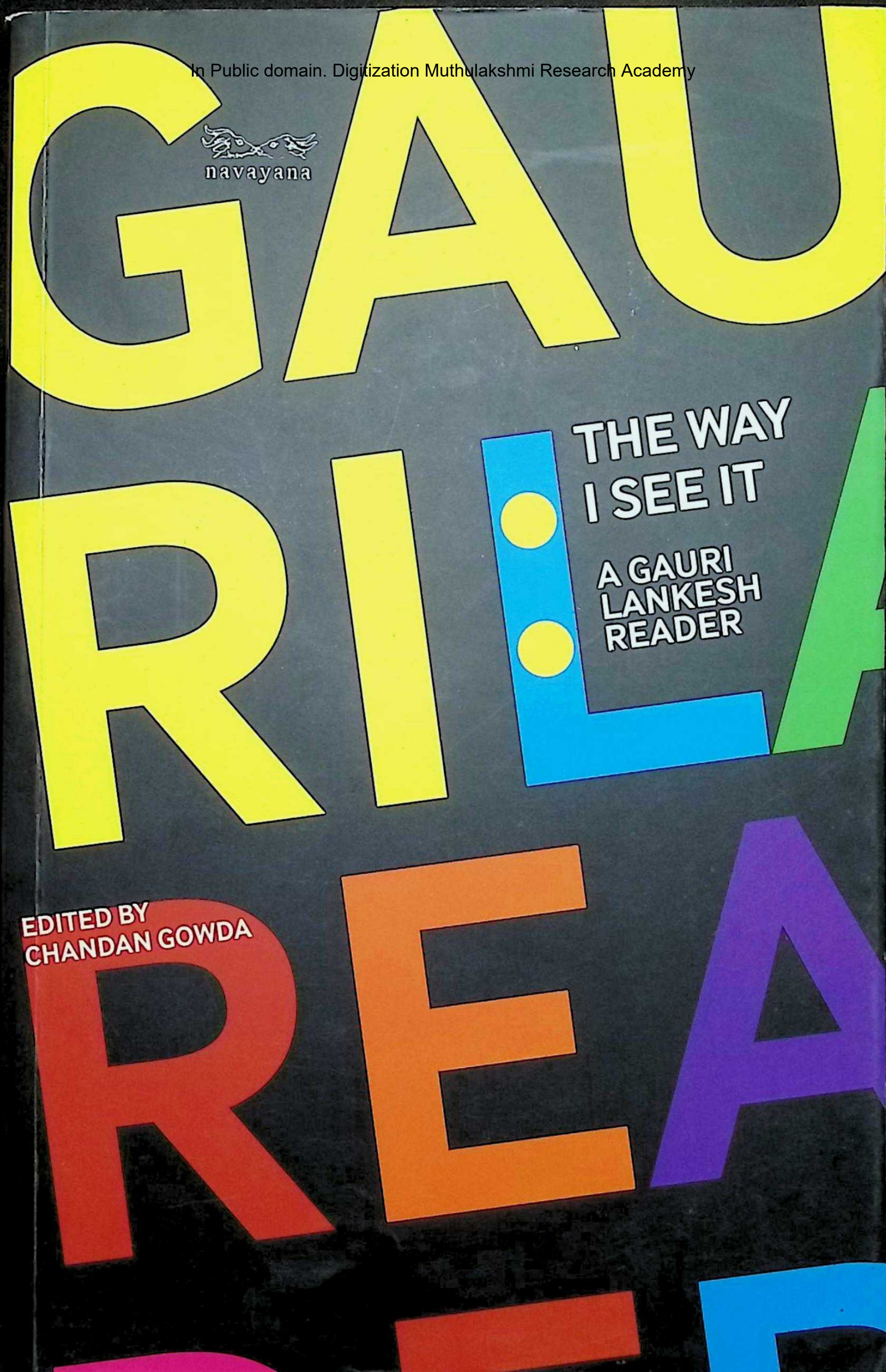

navayana

THE WAY I SEE IT

A GAURI LANKESH READER

EDITED BY
CHANDAN GOWDA

Gauri Lankesh (1962–2017) was the editor of *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*. Starting her career as an English language print journalist, she worked for the *Times of India* and *Sunday* magazine, and was chief of bureau, ETV News, New Delhi, in the 1990s. In 2000, after her father P. Lankesh's death, she took over the editorship of *Lankesh Patrike*, the weekly tabloid that he had founded in 1980. She became a recognizable figure in the social movements of Karnataka after joining the Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum in 2003. The Forum countered the Sangh parivar's campaign to take over the syncretic dargah at Bababudangiri in Chikmagalur district. As an activist and journalist, she stood at the forefront of several struggles for justice, equality and love. She was shot dead outside her home in Bengaluru on 5 September 2017 by unidentified gunmen.

Chandan Gowda teaches at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. He has translated U.R. Ananthamurthy's novella, *Bara*, and a book of autobiographical conversations with Ananthamurthy, *A Life in the World*. He has edited *Theatres of Democracy: Selected Essays of Shiv Visvanathan*. He is a columnist with *Bangalore Mirror* and *Deccan Herald*.

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Edited by Chandan Gowda

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Gauri Lankesh: A timeline

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29 January 1962, Shimoga

Education
The Home School, Bangalore (1967–74)
Vijaya High School, Bangalore (1974–77)
PUC, National College, Basavanagudi, Bangalore (1977–79)
BA (Journalism, History, Tourism), Central College, Basavanagudi, Bangalore (1979–82)
Post-Graduate Diploma (Mass Communication), Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi (1983–84)

Journalism
The Times of India, Bangalore and New Delhi (1985–90)
Sunday (1990–1993; 1994–98)
Chief of Bureau, *ETV News*, New Delhi (1998–2000)
Editor, *Lankesh Patrike* (February 2000–February 2005)
Editor, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike* (March 2005–September 2017)

Published works
Nonfiction

1. *Kanda Haage* (As I see It): Contemporary Essays, Volume 2, Lankesh Prakashana, 2001
2. *Gidugagalige Baliyaada Gili Benazir: The Story of Benazir Bhutto* (Benazir: A parrot amidst hawks), Lankesh Prakashana, 2008

3. *Kanda Haage* (As I see It): Contemporary Essays, Volume 1, Lankesh Prakashana, 2009
4. *Kanda Haage* (As I see It): Contemporary Essays, Volume 3, Lankesh Prakashana, 2013

Translations

1. *Jugaari Cross*, K.P. Purnachandra Tejasvi. Translated from Kannada to English, 1997. Unpublished
2. *Daraveshi Kategalu* (Kannada translation of *Tales of the Dervishes* by Idries Shah), CGK Prakashana, 2002
3. *Kappu Mallige* (Black jasmine: An anthology of modern short stories), Lankesh Prakashana, 2010

Edited volumes

1. *'Aavarana' Yemba Vi-Kriti* (A perverse work called 'Aavarana'), Lankesh Prakashana, 2007
2. *Basavarajamarga: Vyakti-Vichara* (Writings on the life and works of L. Basavaraju), Lankesh Prakashana, 2010

Foreword

Paul Zacharia

Gauri Lankesh trusted the India she lived in. She trusted the democracy she had inherited. Even as she functioned as an implacable critic of the powers that control both, she was like any other citizen in her simple trust. That was why she could be cut down so easily at her own gate, right in the midst of a world she navigated, so to say, with her eyes closed. If she had fears she still chose not to flee but trust. Like millions of Indians, she had placed her faith in a nation that had, seven decades back, held out a marvelous dream of democracy, freedom and well-being to its citizens. That faith was implicit in everything she said and did. It was implicit in the debate, argument and battling. It was the dream she, like her fellow citizens, believed she had inherited from the founding fathers—Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and others—capsuled in that modest document of nationhood of the Indian people: the Constitution. That was the India she fought for, tooth and nail.

But her trust was betrayed, like that of millions of Indians. Witness the calibrated silence of those who rule the nation. Arguably every killing of a citizen cannot enter their registry of flagged events. But Gauri's stances as a secular, democratic public intellectual represented the seminal idea of India itself. Her murder was out of the ordinary and needed to be taken note of by the rulers of the nation because she was a purveyor of democratic ideas, a senior journalist, a spokesperson for the people, for freedom and probity. In that sense it signified more than the murder of her person. It was a determined act of liquidation, of stamping out the values she stood for. It signified a typically fascist, typically cowardly act of making death a tool to silence dissent.

Gauri's murder tragically represents the perilous situation of this nation, hurled into a black-hole of hate, greed, violence and war-mongering. In the seventieth year of our nation we have arrived at a fearsome watershed—the democratic, plural India we trusted and loved may cease to be.

Yet, as an Indian, I firmly believe that Gauri's death also marks a decisive turning point in the nation's battle against fascism. It is tragic that Gauri will not walk with us again. But my humble instinct as a citizen who watches the mysterious ways of this nation tells me that the price Gauri paid with her life for her beliefs has a significance that will reverberate in unexpected ways and echo in hearts where she was unknown till her death. There is still an India that doesn't easily forgive such evil as was perpetrated on her. That India has not been taken yet. That matters.

It is admirable that Chandan Gowda has created this volume of selections from Gauri's writings in Kannada and English so that even though she does not live, her redoubtable mind will continue to reach out to readers everywhere speaking of freedom, humanity and democracy. These writings reflect the free-flowing range of her concerns as a citizen-activist who felt compelled to speak up. I think just as much as she believed it was her right to speak out, she thought it her duty too. She joins a shining list of women and men who spoke up for the finest values enshrined in human history, losing their lives in the process. I firmly believe that the life she lost—and she loved life—will make a difference to India which is now under siege.

Kollam

22 October 2017

Introduction

A ready ally for a fair cause

Chandan Gowda

The Way I See It attempts to introduce the life and work of Gauri Lankesh. What was her vision of the world? What was the nature of her idealism that endeared her to so many?

The essays by Gauri in this book convey a sense of the range of her social and political views and activist concerns, from the early days as an English journalist in the 1990s until the time of her death, when she was the editor of an important Kannada weekly. These writings, especially the ones she wrote after becoming an editor, allow for an understanding of her moral passions, her despair and her hopes. Gauri's autobiographical essays offer valuable glimpses of her childhood experiences and of the seriousness and affection she brought to personal relationships. A few of the essays of tribute narrate her transformation from a free-spirited teenager to a committed social activist.

The irreverence for power, bracing wit and instinct for humanizing a situation which animate Gauri's early journalism, stayed with her till the end. Her article on Sathya Sai Baba is ruthless in its disregard for his power. And, in her riveting account of a serial murderer's exploits, the criminal—when she visits him in prison—asks if he might remove the bandage from his face before being photographed by her colleague. Even a 'political' cover story on the removal of Veerendra Patil as the chief minister of Karnataka makes room for a witty, and illuminating, detail: when Rajiv Gandhi asks for a helicopter for his travel in the state, the CM's office replies that the chopper is under repair and wonders if a car might do instead? The eye for detail and flair in her English reportage are hard to miss.

After fifteen years (1985–2000) of working as an English language journalist—detailed in the timeline this book opens with—Gauri took over as editor of her father's weekly, *Lankesh Patrike*, after his death in early 2000. She had never written in Kannada before. But her keenness to continue her father's legacy made her start work in Kannada journalism. Through the subsequent seventeen years, her Kannada was to improve greatly, but it never achieved the ease and skill of her English. In a moving essay that holds a mirror to a large number of Indians educated in English, she reflects on how she lost touch with her language in school and her ongoing struggle to reclaim it.

As a weekly, *Lankesh Patrike* was hard to classify: it had shrewd political commentary, serious literary criticism as well as literary fiction, strong political satire, and an entertaining page of cinema news. For Palyada Lankesh (1935–2000), one of the foremost modern Kannada writers, politics, literature and cinema, all of them mattered. Besides his rich body of literary work, he had floated a short-lived political party, Pragati Ranga, in 1987. He had directed four feature films too, one of which, *Pallavi* (1976), won the National Award for Best Kannada film. *Lankesh Patrike* famously didn't accept advertisements or state patronage and ran solely on subscription. At its peak, it sold two lakh copies.

Departing from the formal, officious prose of mainstream media, the prose of *Lankesh Patrike* assumed an intimacy with its community of readers. The colloquial sharpness of its political language cannot be understood outside of this context. Coming up with shorthand names for political figures—*Gum* for Gundu Rao, or *Bum* for Bangarappa, or *Gulle Nari* (fox) for Ramakrishna Hegde—illuminated the personalities of these chief ministers in certain ways, brought down power from its heights, enlivened it and made it a community affair. A summary treatment of power and authority marked the pages of *Lankesh Patrike* throughout.

Gauri continued this tradition. Irresponsible acts of the government, errant politicians and other powerful figures, unscrupulous businessmen, all of these came in for scrutiny and censure. In the initial years, she tried to ensure that it had literary content too. On occasions when short fiction hadn't been submitted, she translated a short story on her own to ensure the literary side of the paper remained addressed.

She kept busy with her own writing endeavors alongside running the weekly. She wrote a slim biography of Benazir Bhutto and translated Idries Shah's *Tales of the Dervishes*, and *Kappu Mallige* (Black jasmine), an anthology of short stories by Francoise Sagan, Khushwant Singh, Ismat Chughtai, Guy de Maupassant, O. Henry and Kate Chopin. During a short stay in the US, in 1997, she translated Purnachandra Tejasvi's novel, *Jugari Cross*, into English. (We will need to look for the manuscript now.)

The course of Gauri's career as editor of *Lankesh Patrike* coincided with the mobilization of the Hindu right in Karnataka. Her writings on her struggle in 2003 to secure the shrine for Baba Budan, a Sufi saint, and a Hindu deity, Dattatreya, revered by both Muslims and Hindus, from being occupied by the Hindu right wing, show her as an activist newly arriving at the difficult world of politics. In subsequent years, taking on the growing violence of the Hindu right wing in the state became a major preoccupation. An active participant in the work of the Karnataka Communal Harmony Front, she organized dozens of protest meets to counter their mobilization. Her very last editorial, in fact, dwelt on the worrisome phenomenon of 'fake news' in the country.

The essays in this volume by Gauri's long-time activist colleagues, K. Phaniraj and Rahamat Tarikere, offer a valuable account of her evolution as an activist. The early lack of command over Kannada in no way affected her capacity to mobilize a large protest gathering at Bababudangiri. Acquiring a keener interest in the problems of women, dalits, tribals, Muslims and other vulnerable groups, she was able to deepen her sense for social justice. Gauri's weekly hosted a daring, high risk journalism. Her reporters filed reports of a 'Who kicked whom where?' clarity. Calling out the bad deeds of the powerful invited numerous defamation cases. As a result, Gauri spent much precious time traveling to taluk and district courts across Karnataka. Out of admiration for her idealism, many lawyers across the state worked for her for free.

In dissenting on behalf of democracy, Gauri felt that she was continuing her father's legacy of free-spirited, critical journalism and keeping his fighting spirit alive. Aware that her father had cultivated literary sensibilities in a political weekly, which a journalist like her could sustain only so far, she felt comforted that she, like him, had been uncompromising in the frank expression of views and in the embrace of democratic values. It didn't trouble her that the weekly leaned towards political discussions more than before. "As my father used to say," she recalled, "the paper has to keep changing, like a snake sloughs off its old skin."

Passionate about secular ideals, Gauri, like her father, made ample space for ideas affirming gender and caste equality, peaceful religious coexistence and the welfare of farmers and tribals. An admirer of Ram Manohar Lohia, the socialist thinker, Lankesh had made no space for communist and left extremist politics. But Gauri came to ask her readers—over a two-year period between 2004 and 2005, when naxals had a minor presence in Karnataka—to be sensitive to naxal concerns. However, she never endorsed the naxal boycott of elections since she had faith in elections as a legitimate mode of democracy. Non-violence for her was non-negotiable. In fact, she mediated the surrender of nine naxals in December 2016. Her writings on this question convey, from the start, her earnestness about bringing them into the political mainstream.

The openness she showed towards the concerns of the naxals of Karnataka led to differences with her brother, who was the proprietor of the weekly, and made her launch a new weekly, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, in 2005. Gauri's outspoken views on political matters invited the basest of responses. Her support to the struggles of the vulnerable caste and religious communities in the state also came to matter here. Rattled at first, she soon enough became inured to the threat letters and phone calls. Seeking security from the government was easy, but that would have meant being indebted to it, and a compromise of her freedom. This ethical clarity in her also kept her indifferent to the state government's offer of prime housing plots in Bangalore to journalists.

Gauri's interests, like her father's, ranged wide: journalism, politics, films, literature, plays. Her work as a journalist in Delhi and visits to the US, South Africa, Europe—she lived in Paris in 1993–94 on a scholarship to study journalism—also meant a set of experiences not usually available to editors in the Kannada media. This reflected in the things she wrote about. She welcomed Obama's election victories, admired

Al Gore's documentary on climate change and the Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai's work on the environment, with the ease of someone familiar with those settings.

The over 850 editorial essays she wrote for her weekly engage a rich array of subjects: responses to state and national political issues, local controversies, heroic social activism from different parts of the country and abroad, film reviews, book reviews, sport events, and on occasion, autobiographical and biographical sketches, or essays of condolence for public figures and longtime associates of her paper. Her essays make abundantly clear that her disagreements with power were non-partisan; they take on every political party with equal ease.

These writings show a variety of forms. Most frequently, they were logical elaborations in support of a view. Sometimes, a step by step refutation of a specious argument. On occasion, her op-eds reconstructed episodes with moral import, sometimes in a docu-fiction mode, sometimes in a folktale mode. And, an imagined conversation with someone, or an imagined letter, working as either satire or social commentary, can also be seen. Offering contrasts to clarify her argument was a favorite device of hers: How can a country which spends thousands of crores on space research not care to end manual scavenging in cities? Mechanizing sanitation work costs so little by comparison. If the suspension of a liquor licence to an old club can get high media attention, why not the eviction of a slum? In asking that social injustice not be forgotten, that the enormous violence surrounding us be recognized, Gauri's writings were marked by a sense of personal urgency, and were never dry exhortations.

Many of her activist demands were expressed within the moral parameters of the Indian Constitution. It is unacceptable, she argues, to seat a Jain monk higher than the chief minister and the speaker at a sitting of the Haryana assembly. Deeply caring towards the rights of vulnerable people, her activist demands often asked for compliance with the law. The law, though, didn't exhaust her activist imagination. Many of her essays appeal to humaneness in drawing attention to a problem, in asking for a change of mind. In urging that wisdom prevail, a number of these took the form of retelling stories about how humans set aside social and political differences. After narrating a story of compassion or of brutality, they ended by asking if the reader's heart wasn't stirred or didn't burst with rage. Several of her columns indeed include 'human' and 'humaneness' in the title: "Those who cannot rise above caste are not humans"; "Humaneness triumphs over cruelty."

Gauri's humanism let her stay open to evolving moral situations, and not give in to ideological rigidity. Her passion for humaneness was driven more by intuitive conviction than from an engagement with any humanistic traditions. In the course of her activist life, she did move from being indifferent, even contemptuous, towards religious practices to recognizing the latter's importance in Indian society. In later years, she felt comfortable, for example, sharing platforms with heads of mathas whose social work she admired. She even invited them to the events she organized. Her regard for them appeared to rest on what she felt was their democratic mindedness than on the theological roots of their social activism. Her enthusiastic support for the recent demands of the lingayats to be classified as a separate religion was driven more by a political desire to negate the idea of a uniform Hindu community than theological considerations.

Gauri's remarkable work as publisher is yet to find due attention. Besides ensuring that her father's prodigious literary output—short stories, plays, poetry, autobiography, novels and critical essays—stayed in print, she published several volumes of his previously uncollected writings. Alongside publishing new Kannada fiction and non-fiction, she commissioned translations from several Indian languages into Kannada. For instance, the works of figures like Khushwant Singh, G. Kalyan Rao, Perumal Murugan, D.N. Jha, Saadat Hasan Manto, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Kamala Das, Jim Corbett and Kenneth Anderson and of social activists such as K. Balagopal, A. Revathi, and Anand Teltumbde.

Over the years, Gauri's work brought her close to hundreds of activists from Karnataka and outside, many of whom became personal friends. At a time when few Kannada writers actively participate in political discussions, she, a journalist, vigorously embraced that obligation. Even when one disagreed with her stance or found it rigid, her selfless idealism, affectionate nature and courage endeared her to sensitive youth across the state. Those fighting a fair cause could find a ready ally in her. The mainstream media might have ignored them, but her weekly made space.

It was worrying to see work and activist commitments envelop her the way they did. They didn't allow her a break for months. In a recent conversation, I had tried a new tack: "Lohia was certain that one had to make time for oneself amidst politics. And, your father made sure to keep his evenings free for friends." "Yes," she replied, "Maybe I should take a day off." She never did. During a rare trip to Delhi last year, she had made time to visit JNU and the liveliness of the campus left her enthused: "I wish I had studied there."

In recent years, running the weekly had become a tough financial proposition, especially with its guiding policy of not hosting advertisements or accepting donations. Gauri tried to cross-subsidize the costs through the profits from book sales (including the imprint Guide Prakashana that published a monthly for students taking competitive exams). She had recently decided to make space in her weekly for government ads once a year, starting with the Deepavali special issue this year. It must have been a truly painful decision. Every time I suggested she approach the not-for-profit media foundations for grants, she would say, "Okay. Let's see." She loathed the idea, no doubt.

*

Gauri was one of my closest friends. She and I lived in the same neighborhood in Rajarajeshwarinagar. During my PhD fieldwork years (2001–04), we met just about every evening. She had recently taken over as editor of *Lankesh Patrike*. Since she had her dinner past midnight, a long day at work didn't mean an early end to the evening. From local gossip to goings-on in the world at large, we would continue talking, at her house or mine, by ourselves or with friends. A journalist at bottom, Gauri found it amusing if I settled for surface-level accounts. For her, there was usually something else astir beneath appearances.

A gracious host, who enjoyed having people over, Gauri made her guests feel at ease within no time. I never saw clutter in her house. The book shelves, the living room furniture, the kitchen: tidiness was everywhere. The front garden, in particular, meant a lot to her. When I visited her at her house, two weeks before her death, I noticed the bushy plants in it had been cleared. Her mother had got them removed for fear of snakes. The snake threat was always present but Gauri didn't seem to mind. She was now planning to grow vegetables in the newly cleared area.

Early journalism in English

Sathya Sai Baba: Heaven can wait

Nothing about the Sai Baba is certain, and everything is surrounded by controversy. Is he, in fact, the reincarnation of the Sathya Sai Baba of Shirdi as he claims? Or is he just a conjurer with a nice line in sleight of hand as the magician P.C. Sorcar Junior had written in *Sunday*?[1] Is he a divine personage who is beyond human desire as his devotees insist? Or is he a fondler of pilgrims as one American follower has claimed in print? The controversies extend even to last week's assassination attempt—assuming that there was an assassination attempt, after all. At Sai Baba's Puttaparthi ashram (in Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh), officials are tight-lipped about the incident and the swami has assumed his normal pose of Afro-headed nonchalance. But at least some of the police investigators are beginning to doubt whether anybody intended to kill Sai Baba at all.

Some facts, however, are incontrovertible. At 10 p.m. on Sunday, 6 June [1993], four of Sai Baba's devotees went to Mandiram, his residence within the Puttaparthi ashram, and said that they wanted to see him. The four men lived in the ashram, and were known to other devotees. They were: Suresh Shantaram Prabhu (35), Jaganatham (40), Suresh Kumar (33) and Sai Ram (25). So, when they said that they wanted to deliver a telegram to the swami, it should not have been a cause for surprise. But it was. The four men were refused entry into Mandiram, and devotees tried to stop them.

---

[1] The report on Sorcar Jr's meeting with Sai Baba features at the end of this piece.

According to the ashram version, the four turned on these devotees and attacked them with knives. Radhakrishna, a member of Sai Baba's personal staff, was stabbed to death, as was Sai Kumar, a student. Two others were also knifed and are now in hospital. According to the official version, Sai Baba, who was in his bedroom, heard sounds of the struggle and promptly took evasive action. Apparently, he moved to an adjoining section of the building, bolted the door from inside and disappeared into the garage through a staircase. Evidently, he also activated an alarm and sirens sounded while floodlights swept the ashram. Bemused by this hi-tech security, the four intruders rushed into Sai Baba's living room and locked themselves in. They refused all appeals to give themselves up. What happened next remains the subject of some mystery. According to one version, the police broke a section of the door and fired indiscriminately into the living room, immediately killing all four men. The official version according to K.N. Gangadhar, the police inspector in charge of the area, is that the brave police officers broke open the door and entered the room to apprehend the perpetrators. But, says Gangadhar, the intruders charged at the police with knives. So the brave policemen shot them dead. Now, nobody is willing to talk about the possible motive for the attack. As for the alleged assassins, they are all dead.

As befits a man who is personal guru to the president and the prime minister of India, the official reaction was swift and high-powered. The home minister, S.B. Chavan, himself a devotee, tore himself away from the problems of Punjab and Kashmir and hot-footed it to Puttaparthi to personally supervise the investigation. There were the inevitable whispers that Chavan had been despatched by Narasimha Rao, who was concerned about the swami's welfare. Meanwhile, the BJP Hand—which has replaced that old standby, the Foreign Hand, as the Congress' current obsession—was invoked. The Andhra Pradesh government dispatched H.J. Dora, the police commissioner of Hyderabad, to Puttaparthi, apparently to search for clues. But soon after Dora got there, it rapidly became clear that his mission was to see if the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) were involved in the incident. In no time, the Baba's formerly tight-lipped devotees began to suggest that the four assailants were known to Ashok Singhal, the VHP secretary-general, and that they had met him when he visited Puttaparthi in February. It was not immediately clear why the VHP or the RSS would want to kill a godman with apparent magic powers and an eclectic collection of followers, but Congressmen in Delhi plugged away at this line till the BJP, annoyed at this attempt to politicize the incident, demanded a full inquiry into what had really happened.

Meanwhile, even as S.B. Chavan spent thirty minutes alone with the swami, the police claimed that they had discovered three live landmines weighing over fifty kilograms each in a part of the Puttaparthi complex. The mines were found on the premises of the Baba's vocational training institute, and if the police were to be believed, they contained the trendy explosive of the moment—RDX. Further, suggested the investigators, the RDX had been dispatched to Puttaparthi on the western tip of Andhra Pradesh by landing agents in Bombay.

This discovery created even more confusion. Even the VHP's worst enemies have not suggested that the organization has access to RDX. So, on what basis were the authorities trying to drag the Sangh parivar into the imbroglio? And inevitably, there was talk of a communal overtone: after all, Sai Baba is a Hindu religious leader of sorts. Even as these conflicting hypotheses added to the swirling controversy, a new theory began to emerge. Now, the entire incident was said to be the consequence of a battle for power within the Puttaparthi ashram. If devotees were to be believed, the Baba's multinational operation was heading the way of Muktananda's corporation (which split when his chosen successor seduced a devotee), or of the Hare Krishna movement which splintered into innumerable factions shortly after the death of Abhay Charan De, who was also known as Prabhupada.

Born Satyanarayana Raju to a poor agricultural family at Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh on 23 November 1926, the swami began to display his 'miraculous' powers very early in life. During his stint at the high school at Uravakonda, he would routinely produce pencils, fruits and sweets for his school friends out of thin air. His divine powers, apparently, came to the fore after he was bitten by a scorpion. After that he never returned to school, began to perform miracles, and claimed that he was the reincarnation of the Sathya Sai Baba of Shirdi.

To such devotees as Shiv Shankar, a resident at the Puttaparthi ashram, however, he is 'Shiva reincarnate', a claim that is buttressed by the swami's habit of regurgitating lingams after prayer sessions. Not surprisingly then, his followers include the highest and mightiest of this land—prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, president Shankar Dayal Sharma, former president R. Venkataraman, home minister S.B. Chavan, BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee, former Sri Lankan president Ranasinghe Premadasa, musicians Bhimsen Joshi, Ravi Shankar, M.S. Subbulakshmi and Anup Jalota, former Beatle George Harrison, cricketer Sunil Gavaskar, former chief justice P.N.

Bhagwati, chief of air staff N.C. Suri and chief of Apollo Hospitals Pratap C. Reddy—all of whom depend on him to rid them of their problems.

Former Karnataka chief minister, S. Bangarappa, for instance, made a trip to Puttaparthi and donated Rs 5 crores from the state's cash-starved resources to Sai Baba's super-speciality hospital, on the grounds that "a number of poor people from Karnataka go there for treatment." Narasimha Rao, a fellow devotee of the Baba, dismissed him [in 1992] from the chief ministership nevertheless. Such failures, however, do not to diminish the swami's appeal. The devotees continue to pour in from all over the world, though Sai Baba is the least media-savvy of all Indian godmen. Unlike publicity junkies such as Mahesh Yogi and Chandra Swami, the Baba fights shy of granting interviews to the media. In fact, he rarely speaks at his darshans, restricting his interaction with his devotees to the odd pat on the hand, the occasional twirl of the hand to produce vibhuti (sacred ash), and somewhat incongruously, fistfuls of lozenges. Despite a large international following, the swami has been abroad exactly once—when he visited Uganda to attend that country's Independence Day celebrations. Even his travels within the country are restricted to Bombay, Madras and Bangalore. Over the last four years, though, he has been going to Kodaikanal, where he gives darshans in spirituality to the participants of summer camps. But the Baba doesn't really need to travel: Puttaparthi has its own airport, and his devotees can visit him whenever they wish, though it is far from certain that they will catch more than a glimpse of the Baba on these occasions.

Sai Baba has been the subject of many a controversy, but none more unsavory than the one surrounding his relations with his American devotee, Tal Brooke. In his book about his experiences at the Baba's ashrams at Whitefield, a suburb of Bangalore, and Puttaparthi, *Lord of the Air*, Brooke revealed what he considered to be the seamy underside of the swami's empire. According to Brooke, his disillusionment with his guru began when the Baba began to make sexual advances towards him. On one occasion, Sai Baba asked Brooke to stay back for a 'private interview' after the darshan. After detailing a list of his sins, the godman got up and hugged Brooke tightly. Recounts Brooke, "The Baba's hug got tighter. Then a thought crept out of some dark abyss. I almost suppressed it before I fully sensed it. His breathing is deeper, more intense. Why does he need to twist his pelvis?"

At first, Brooke was willing to give Sai Baba the benefit of the doubt. Some days later, Brooke had another private interview. This time, the experience was far more upsetting. Brooke writes, "Baba's nudging pelvis stopped. Suddenly a hand unzipped my fly and burrowed inside. I was aghast. I had vowed to pursue truth, but did it require these labyrinths. I stood my ground, trying not to flinch, while reason screamed, 'If Baba is who he claims to be, it is inconceivable that he would stoop to impurity.' Baba's hips started to shift again as his hand squeezed. There was no response. I was frozen out. Baba's breathing came rapid and excited."

Then, the ordeal ended, with the Baba saying, "Very happy, go now." Blind faith in the Baba, however, ensured that Brooke stayed on with the swami. Until he realized that he was not the only recipient of the godman's attentions. Several other devotees, he discovered, had also been subject to the same treatment, and had submitted, thinking that it was some purification rite conducted by the swami and a test of their devotion to him. Brooke was shattered by this discovery. But he realized that if he went public, it would be his word against the Baba's, and nobody would believe him. In the end, however, Brooke decided to put his version on the record.

Lord of the Air was denounced bitterly by Sai Baba's devotees, who insisted that the events narrated in it were figments of Brooke's hyperactive imagination. But the publication of the book served to fan persistent rumours that sexual abuse was rampant at the swami's ashrams. Gossip had it that several boy students at the educational institutions run by the Baba had committed suicide after being sexually abused. But these reports were not shored up by any evidence, and the ashram authorities soon succeeded in suppressing them.

That, however, is one of the more far-fetched theories of the motive behind the assassination attempt—if it was, in fact, an assassination attempt. Most people are inclined to go along with the view that this was the work of Hindu fanatics. This version has some merit. After all, the Baba has always taken a very moderate line on the Ram Janmabhoomi–Babri Masjid issue. At his birthday celebration at Puttaparthi, in 1990, he had broken his silence on political matters and commented on the mandir–masjid tangle. "When Ram is in everyone's hearts," he is supposed to have said, "what is the need for a temple?" This, it is believed, may have placed him on the hit-list of fundamentalist Hindus. It is perhaps this realization that led to the swami keeping a very low profile of late. At times, it almost seemed as if he was deliberately distancing himself from the current political situation in the country.

The recent assassination attempt has, however, yanked him back into the spotlight. And the attendant publicity has been far from favorable: most press reports have suggested that bitter factional fights within the ashram led to the recent violent attack by some devotees, who thought they were being pushed out of the Baba's charmed circle. But even before media investigations into the controversy could get underway, a veil of secrecy was drawn around the Puttaparthi ashram. And with such political luminaries as home minister S.B. Chavan joining the damage-control squad, there is little likelihood that the complete story of the assassination attempt on the swami will ever be told. The truth will, as always, remain an elusive commodity where Sai Baba is concerned, even as the godman's myth endures.

Miracle man or petty magician?

The meeting between P.C. Sorcar Junior and Sathya Sai Baba has now become the stuff of legend. According to the magician, he had asked for an appointment with the Baba on many occasions, only to be turned down. Finally, he asked to see the swami, posing as the son of a prominent West Bengal industrialist. The godman agreed to see him. After Sai Baba had given him a darshan, Sorcar asked for a gift. The Baba asked him to wait, and went into the next room, presumably to hide some object or the other up his sleeve. Meanwhile, Sorcar had seen a plate of sweets lying in the room. He grabbed one and hid it on his person. Sai Baba returned shortly, and duly produced a sandesh out of thin air. Sorcar said he didn't like sandeshes, and changed it 'miraculously' to a rossogolla instead. The livid godman threw the magician out.

Today, Sorcar scoffs, "He is no godman. He is not even a good magician. He is so clumsy that he is spoiling the name of all magicians. I think he should practise a lot more." Sorcar's opinions were borne out by recent events. In November last year, the swami attended a function in Hyderabad to open a Kalyana Mandapam (marriage hall). In front of a huge audience that included prime minister Rao, Sai Baba produced a gold chain out of thin air. Unfortunately for the godman, the event was being covered by Doordarshan, and the camera does not lie—it does not even get taken in by sleight of hand. When the tape was replayed, it showed one of the Baba's assistants passing the chain to him, which the godman then 'produced' a few minutes later. But the Baba doesn't have a high-powered disciple list for nothing. The tape, which had done the rounds in the Hyderabad kendra of Doordarshan, was killed.

Despite such fiascos, stories about the Baba's miraculous powers continue to do the rounds. One such story revolves around the mentally retarded son of S. Bhagavantham, former scientific advisor to the ministry of defence. When the young boy was brought to meet the swami, he produced some vibhuti and rubbed it on the boy's back. Then, with another wave of his hand, Sai Baba produced a long needle, punctured the boy's spine and drew out some liquid. He then 'produced' some surgical dressing to put on the boy's back. Apparently this procedure cured the young boy. Bhagavatham, however, denounced the godman as a fake towards the end of his life. He never went public with the reasons for his disillusionment with the Baba, but cut the godman out of his life completely.

Other devotees continue to swear by Sai Baba. According to them, he can cure his followers by taking on whatever illnesses they are suffering from, and can cure himself of any ailment as well. On Guru Purnima day, for instance, he is believed to have cured himself of paralysis in front of a large gathering. This is hotly disputed by a doctor in Goa, who operated on the godman for appendicitis. According to him, he was shocked when he heard Sai Baba tell his disciples that he couldn't give them darshan because he had transmigrated to another body. The swami is also believed to have suffered from a heart attack a few years ago, for which he required medical attention. But news of that was never allowed to get out.

The recent assassination attempt on the godman has provided further ammunition to his critics. Dr H. Narasimhaiah, the head of the Rationalist Movement who has spearheaded a movement against Sai Baba for several decades, says, "The events at Puttaparthi have vindicated our stand. They have proved that he is just another human being, with no supernatural powers."

Narasimhaiah maintains that if Sai Baba was a true godman he would have been able to predict the attack upon himself. "At least," he says, "when his assailants entered the room, he could have used his powers to disarm or overpower them. Instead, he did exactly what I would have done: he ran away. One of the signboards at his ashram says, 'Why fear when I am here.' But he has shown that he is full of fear himself."

Sai Baba, for his part, refused to engage the rationalists in a debate, or even perform his 'miracles' in controlled conditions. But he has been known to tell a devotee, "Do not compare me to a petty magician. My power is divine and has no limit. I have the power to change the earth into the sky and the sky into the earth. But I don't because there is no reason to."

20–26 June 1993, *Sunday*

Operation Sivarasan: End of the hunt?

For three months, from the end of May till 20 August 1991, he was the centre of the nation's concentrated attention. He was the subject of animated debate at every possible place—cocktail parties, coffee shops, street corners. During the same period, his face was more widely publicized than that of many film stars and Union ministers. His photographs were splashed by newspapers, found their way to the covers of magazines and peered out of pamphlets and wall posters. His movements—imaginary or otherwise—were followed with all-consuming interest by a people hungry for information. Is he holed up in Madras? Wasn't he sighted in New Delhi the other day? Didn't he try to escape via Nepal? Surely, he had already escaped to Sri Lanka? Last week, the most systematic and organized manhunt in the history of India (and possibly the world) ended at a small village on the outskirts of Bangalore.

The Special Investigating Team (SIT) probing Rajiv Gandhi's assassination finally caught up with Sivarasan—the 'One-Eyed Jack' who masterminded the hit. What the investigators found, however, was a body with two bullets in the head and, possibly, cyanide in the stomach. Huddled around him were the bodies of six other members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—including that of his cousin and accomplice, the 22-year-old Subha. All of them, evidently, had preferred suicide to giving themselves up to the SIT. Ironically, their bodies were found on 20 August, Rajiv Gandhi's 47th birth anniversary.

"It is like a load off my shoulders," Central Bureau of

Investigation (CBI) chief Vijay Karan told *Sunday* soon after the dramatic event. "At least, the business of tracking Sivarasan down has ended." But many believed that Sivarasan's suicide had more or less ended the SIT's hopes of making further progress on the assassination case. And that with his death, the chances of unearthing the full details of the conspiracy had also died.

It was on the morning of 18 August that Sivarasan's whereabouts became known. The information was provided, oddly enough, by a schoolteacher called Mrs Mridula Ranganath. Soon after she was arrested in Bangalore that morning by the Karnataka police, Mrs Ranganath told the cops that Sivarasan was holed up at a house in Konana Kunte, a small village some 20 km from Bangalore. By the afternoon, the state police—led by deputy commissioner Kempaiah—and a few members of the National Security Guard (NSG) had surrounded the house. As a tense Kempaiah and his men kept watch for signs of movement within the building, the militants—who evidently knew they were surrounded—took care not to reveal themselves. All the police saw were faces peering out of windows on a few occasions. Kempaiah's brief was limited to ensuring that the militants did not escape. The state police had decided that it would not try to storm the house as it had done in earlier raids. "This particular situation warranted handling of a delicate nature," explained Bangalore's commissioner of police R. Ramalingam. "We thought it was best to consult the CBI and the SIT."

By the time CBI chief Vijay Karan and SIT head D.R. Karthikeyan had flown into Bangalore the following day (Monday the 19th), Kempaiah had established that Subha was also present in the building. The state police had interrogated a woman who delivered milk to the house who said she had seen someone who matched Subha's descriptions. Until then, the police had assumed that only Sivarasan lived in the building.

That day of waiting was to prove eventful. In the morning, an autorickshaw with two men pulled up at the house. On seeing that the house was surrounded by policemen, the two got out of the vehicle and attempted to run away. They didn't get very far and both were caught with the help of cooperative villagers. One of the men turned out to be Mridula Ranganath's husband; the other a Prakash Kumar. The former told Kempaiah exactly how many people were in the house. It was only then that the police became absolutely sure that Sivarasan and Subha—the two most wanted people in the case—had been cornered. It was on that evening the firing began, triggered off purely by accident.

A truck loaded with firewood had got stuck on the muddy road close to the house. When a few plainclothesmen tried to move the truck, the Sri Lankan militants opened fire, injuring three. Apparently, the militants mistakenly believed that the police were preparing to storm the building. Says police commissioner Ramalingam: "We were surprised by the firing. It was indiscriminate." After a lull of a few minutes, the Tigers began shooting again. This time, it was returned by the police, which by then had been strengthened by the addition of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) platoons. In all, there were around seven hundred policemen ranged against the seven militants within the building. Soon after the second round of firing had stopped, the sound of a gunshot emanated from the house. It was discovered only later that this was when Sivarasan killed himself.

Meanwhile, a small team of crack NSG commandos had left Delhi for Bangalore by helicopter. The team had stopped at Gwalior to pick up a specially formulated antidote for cyanide, which the militants were certain to use in the event of the house being stormed. By the break of dawn on Tuesday, 20 August, the preparations—which many believe took far too long—were in place. A number of ambulances, which were to be used to rush the militants to hospital—if necessary—were moved nearby. And the floodlights, which were erected to illuminate the house, were turned off.

By 6.30 a.m., five NSG commandos were readied to make the assault. The plan was to enter the building from the terrace of a neighbour's house. After stealthily making their way to the top, the commandos positioned a ladder, which acted as a bridge between the houses. As soon as they had crossed over, the men blasted open a door with gelignite sticks and made their way down the staircase. As they went down, they fired five rounds with their sten guns. They needn't have. Sivarasan, Subha and the other five militants—one of them a girl with an artificial leg—were already dead. Having confirmed this, one of the commandos gave a thumbs down signal to the anxious Vijay Karan, Karthikeyan and other police officials waiting outside. Its meaning: everybody inside was dead. *Sunday*, which witnessed the whole operation, was allowed to enter the house a few minutes after it was over. The scene inside was gruesome. While Sivarasan had clearly used his AK-47, which lay nearby, to shoot himself in the head, the rest had swallowed cyanide.

All of them had been dead for at least a few hours and Subha's face had already begun to take on an ashen pallor. Blood had caked around the mouths of all those who had taken the poison. Five of the bodies lay about in a huddle, leading people to believe that the militants had grouped around before taking their lives. Both Sivarasan and Subha were well-attired. While Subha was in white trousers and a kurta, Sivarasan had on a fashionable dark blue T-shirt and greyish baggy trousers. Subha's nails were painted and she had new silver toe-rings and anklets. Her body lay close to that of the girl with the artificial leg, an arm wrapped protectively around her.

The manner in which Sivarasan was traced was just as dramatic. It appears that there was a feeling of desperation and hopelessness among SIT members before the vital lead was unearthed. Two days before the Konana Kunte operation, the CBI's Vijay Karan had phoned a senior police officer in New Delhi and expressed doubts about whether Sivarasan would ever be found. "We seem to have run out of leads," Karan is supposed to have told the official.

The credit for tracking Sivarasan down must go to the Karnataka police. The force stumbled on the first clue when it raided an LTTE hideout on 17 August in Muthati village in Mandya district. (Six militants committed suicide by taking cyanide when the house was stormed; three others were hospitalized.) A scrap of paper recovered from the building carried the name of an Anjanappa followed by Puttenahalli (an area of Bangalore). The following morning (18th), the police visited Anjanappa's house. But he wasn't there. However, the man turned up at the police station after a few hours. Anjanappa admitted to having visited the Muthati hideout, but claimed that he did not know that the youths—who pretended to be part of a film unit—were LTTE cadres. He told the police that he was taken to Muthati by his friend, a Mr Ranganath who had left Anjanappa's name and address with the youths. This was so that they could contact Ranganath through Anjanappa, if necessary.

The police then went to Ranganath's house, also in Puttenahalli in Bangalore, but found that he had moved out a couple of days ago. They then traced the van used to move the household articles and discovered that he had shifted to Vijaynagar colony. As they were lying in wait for him, they picked up Ranganath's wife Mridula as she was leaving the house with a bag full of clothes. On questioning her, the policemen realized that they had hit pay dirt. Mridula told them that Sivarasan was hiding in a house in Konana Kunte village. Says deputy commissioner Kempaiah: "Mridula assumed that we arrested her because she knew about Sivarasan's whereabouts. So, she gave us the information even before we asked for it. I was just astounded."

The Ranganaths had harboured both Sivarasan and Subha in their Puttenahalli house for a whole fortnight in August. And the couple had arranged to rent the Konana Kunte house for the assassins only a couple of days before. Why did the Ranganaths harbour Sivarasan and Subha? At the moment, the answer is somewhat unclear. But *Sunday* learns that the husband—the proprietor of a factory which makes small-scale equipment—came under the sway of the LTTE during his stay in Switzerland and Singapore. Apparently, an LTTE member called Mahendra had a great influence on him. Karnataka police sources say that it was Mahendra who requested Ranganath to help Sivarasan out. The question that has nagged many following the Konana Kunte operation is whether Sivarasan and Subha could have been captured alive. To be fair, the answer is: very probably not. As the SIT and the police have discovered over the last month, LTTE cadres—who always have cyanide at hand—are more than ready to use it when threatened with arrest. In Karnataka alone, over twenty have committed suicide when apprehended.

Nevertheless, the manner in which Operation Sivarasan was carried out raises a number of questions. Why was so much time allowed to lapse between the discovery of the

Konana Kunte hideout and the storming of it? The Karnataka police had surrounded the hideout by the afternoon of 18 August. It was only on the morning of the 20th that the SIT was ready to have the house broken into. Surely, only a quick and decisive operation could have prevented—if at all—the suicides? It is also unclear why the crack NSG team which was sent to Bangalore took so long in arriving. Moreover, what was the need to waste further time by asking the team to stop at Gwalior to pick up an antidote to cyanide? If it was needed, then it could have been flown down through someone else to Bangalore.

Finally, there is the matter of the leaks. By the afternoon of the 18th, word was around that Sivarasan's hideout had been discovered. And by the following morning, every Bangalore journalist worth his salt knew that the police had him cornered. In fact, some evening newspapers carried stories about it the same day (19th)—a whole day before the hide-out was stormed. All in all, the lack of secrecy—given the sensitivity of the task—was deplorable. What happens to the SIT's investigations now? SIT officials say that their task will continue and that while Sivarasan's death is a blow, it is not as tremendous a loss as people make out. The team has emphasized that Sivarasan's suicide—which was likely if he was threatened with apprehension anyway—is a far better outcome than his possible escape to Sri Lanka. All the same, his death will make it extremely difficult for the SIT to unearth the full details of the conspiracy. Some people have suggested that—with the principal suspect now dead—it won't be long before the SIT starts to file its charge-sheets. But it appears that the team will need much more evidence than it has collected until now if it is going to secure the convictions of those it has arrested. Therefore, it won't be surprising if the team continues with the investigation, until—improbable though it seems—it can come up with evidence that will stand up in court. But, irrespective of what Karthikeyan and his men choose to do, it is unlikely that the nation will continue to follow the case with the same fervor as before. The investigation won't die with Sivarasan but it will, very probably, no longer be the centre of the nation's concentrated attention.

25–31 August 1991, *Sunday*

Coorg: Seeking statehood

Coorg. In the nation's imagination, it is a blessed region: picture postcard perfect with its dense forests, paddy fields and plantations. But all is no longer calm and serene in this tiny Karnataka district ringed by mountains. Recent events have raised fears that the Coorgs (or Kodavas), who comprise a distinct ethnic group, may go the way of the Bodos, the Jharkhandis or the Kashmiris. The fears—which may well be exaggerated—have arisen because of the call by a recently constituted body called the Kodagu Ekikarana Ranga (KER) for the separation of Coorg (or Kodagu) from Karnataka. The KER is a front comprising a few organizations—including theatre and cultural groups—which represent the interests of the people.

The immediate cause for the call for a separate state was a decision by Karnataka chief minister S. Bangarappa, which Coorgs feel threaten their way of life. In December 1990, the chief minister announced that his government planned, as a socialist measure, to acquire the jamma lands belonging to the Coorgs and redistribute them to the poor. The state government's contention is that these lands were granted on a tenurial basis by the kings who ruled Coorg and that the beneficiaries were not given property rights over the holdings. Therefore, the government could do what it thought fit with the jamma lands.

The Coorgs, however, dispute this claim. According to them, the jamma (which means birth-right) tenures were regularized during the reign of Doddaveeraraja in the eighteenth century as recognition of the military service that the Coorgs had rendered to the kingdom. They hold that the property rights were handed over to the jamma landholders until 'the sun and moon exist'.

The way the KER sees it, Bangarappa's decision has more than just economic implications for the Coorgs. Says Mathanda C. Monappa, the president of KER. "He has also hurt our sentiments because the jamma system is an integral part of Coorg culture. For example, jamma lands have been a factor in binding Coorgs together. The lands—which total about two and a half lakh acres—are not owned individually, but always by families; sometimes as many as a hundred families are dependent on a holding. Moreover, it is the jamma lands where the joint family house (a place for reunions) and the graves of ancestors (important for a people who worship them) are situated. Says H. Kempanna, one of the many affected, "The seven acres I own are barely enough to support our ten-member family. Yet Bangarappa says he wants to take it away. We have even been paying taxes on it."

The land controversy—while perhaps the most emotional issue among the Coorgs today—is not the only cause of their anger. For long, they have felt that their district has received little or no attention ever since Coorg was merged with Karnataka in 1956. Says the KER president Monappa of his organization's call for a separate Coorg: "We have been ignored by successive governments for many years. We are tired of presenting memorandum after memorandum as they have come to no avail." (Monappa is also the president of the powerful Akhila Kodava Samaja, an organization which serves the interests of the Coorgs.)

Most of the other issues which agitate the Coorgs concern the few benefits the region has received despite earning huge revenues for the state and the nation. According to Monappa, the exchequer becomes richer by as much as Rs 400 crores a year from coffee and other produce such as cardamom and oranges from Coorg. Moreover, a sizeable portion of this is in foreign exchange. Says Monappa, "Last year, only a paltry Rs 33 crores was routed back to Coorg. Of this, as much as Rs 18 crores was earmarked for salaries of government employees."

The KER is also upset with the share of river water that the region receives. Says a KER leader, "We worship the Cauvery river, but do not get water from it. Till now, the projects to tap water have benefited other areas only. At the same time, the government denies us a measly Rs 6 crores for a lift irrigation scheme that the district desperately needs.

One longstanding complaint that Coorgs have had is the influx of 'outsiders' into the district. Over the years, migrants—mainly from Kerala—have settled in Coorg. The Coorgs see them as having occupied their lands and wrested control of trade—particularly, that of timber. Says retired government official Allaranya Mandaipa sarcastically, "Today, you will have to search for ethnic Coorgs here."

During the past few years, there have been a number of clashes between the migrants and native Coorgs. Although the KER claims its movement is not aimed against any community or group, it is well known that the 'outsider problem' is a major cause for the disaffection of the Coorgs. The KER has listed a set of demands which it has given the government until 17 March to fulfil. Among the demands are the regularization of revenue lands, the checking of illegal felling and smuggling of timber, the reduction of taxes on coffee growers and enhanced power supply to the plantations.

The organization has called for a peaceful but disruptive agitation from 17 March onwards if the government fails to comply. "We will aim to break the laws which we think are unacceptable to Coorgs," says Monappa. Although it is not clear how much support this will evoke, the KER has demonstrated that it does enjoy some popularity in the region. On 17 January, the organization held a massive rally in the old fort area of Mercara (the district headquarters). On that day, people were asked not to pay land revenues and the KER arranged for the illegal sale of coffee. Plays which focus on the injustices meted out to the Coorgs were performed on the streets and video cassettes on the same theme were circulated and publicly screened.

What the KER has achieved so far is to instil an awareness among the people of the plight of their district. Today, the organization's purple and green flag can be seen fluttering atop many a home in Coorg. What must be of more concern for the government, however, is what the KER will resort to on and after 17 March. Although Monappa stresses that the organization will never take to arms to fight for the cause of Coorg, some members appear not to share his relatively moderate approach. Says one, "We have given Bangarappa two months to retract his remarks about jamma lands. So if there is violence after 17 March, don't blame us." The note of militancy is certainly alarming, particularly as a number of Coorgs possess firearms.

According to the district's deputy commissioner H. Bhaskar, jamma land owners themselves have as many as ten thousand licences—each licence being valid for the possession of three firearms. The KER estimates that there are as many as 1,80,000 such weapons in Coorg. One fear is that if the atmosphere becomes much more emotionally charged, the arms could fall into the hands of disgruntled youths. Already, there are worrying but unconfirmed reports of the formation of a militant organization called the Kodagu Liberation Front.

Nevertheless, Karnataka's politicians do not appear too concerned with the developments in Coorg. Until now, the district's three MLAs—all from the Congress (I)—have chosen not to utter a single word about the KER or its activities. Says district MLC A.K. Subbaiah: "The ones who are making the noise are irrelevant people in Coorg's politics. They do not deserve being taken note of." Subbaiah says that the movement is unlikely to take a militant turn: "Coorgs are not capable of such things. If the KER thinks that such an approach will pay, it is sadly mistaken."

Although Bangarappa has not responded to the KER's demands, state minister T.N. Narasimha Reddy (who oversees the Coorg region) says that the government will not buckle under pressure. "Threats of agitation will not make us yield and any unlawful act will be dealt with strictly," he says. All in all, the government seems to be convinced that there is not much cause for worry and those who have raised the bogey of a south Indian Bodoland or Jharkhand are being foolish and alarmist. It could be right. But it may prove just as unwise to sit back and wish that the grouses of the Coorgs would simply go away.

24–30 March 1991, *Sunday*

Nagaraja: The Bangalore Strangler

It was their saris he liked. Colorful, dull, bright, shiny, thin, thick, flimsy, stiff—any kind of sari would do. So long as the woman was wearing a sari, Nagaraja wanted her. First, he would tear off the sari. Later, when she least expected it, he would twist the fabric into a knot, lasso her neck and yank at the edges of the cloth. Finally, he would leave her dead, sprawled on the ground, her sari pulled high above her naked body, so that it was snaked around her throat. At nights, he would prowl the streets looking for sari-clad women.

In January 1991, he was lurking in the shadows of the dimly-lit streets near the Bangalore railway station, when he saw Jayalakshmi (not her real name: her true identity is yet to be established). She stood enticingly beneath a lamp-post, eyes darting from one end of the street to the other. Nagaraja recognized her at once for what she was: a street-walker. And yes, he liked her sari. He summoned his friend Gopal, another of the vagrants and petty criminals who frequented the railway station area. Did Gopal feel like some fun? He did.

The two men sauntered towards Jayalakshmi, whose eyes lit up at the thought of a customer. "How much?" asked Nagaraja. Jayalakshmi outlined her usual arrangement. She would escort the men to a sleazy hotel that charged by the hour and would accept a combined rate if both were interested in her. Nagaraja was unimpressed. "No," he said, "I want to take you out into the open air." Jayalakshmi looked surprised. "We will take an auto to a scenic spot and then, when we are finished, we'll drop you back," he insisted.

Jayalakshmi upped her rate. "In that case," she said, "it is Rs 200." "A hundred and fifty. Take it or leave it." Nagaraja was matter-of-fact. She took it.

The three of them found an auto and drove twenty minutes out of the centre of Bangalore to a wooded spot ringed with eucalyptus trees. "Here," said Nagaraja, and ordered the driver to stop. As they wandered away into the trees, Gopal paid the auto off. Jayalakshmi looked worried. "Don't worry," said Nagaraja. "We'll take you back."

Having come this far, she was in no position to argue. It was Gopal who took her first. Once he was through, Nagaraja had his opportunity. But his style was different: more violent, more driven. Jayalakshmi cowered under him wondering what would come next. But when he did make his move, it took her by total surprise. He seized her sari, now bunched up over her chest and yanked at the pallu. Before she could respond, he had wrapped it over her neck. She started to struggle, but it was too late. Nagaraja pulled at the fabric with the strength of a man possessed—which, of course, he was. As he choked the air out of her and broke her neck, her body gave up the struggle. Still, he kept pulling till finally even he accepted that there was not much more to be done. Then, seemingly oblivious of the murder he had just committed, Nagaraja hitched up his trousers and removed the few pathetic ornaments that Jayalakshmi had on her body. He slipped these into his pocket and motioned to Gopal. They wandered back to the main road, hitched a ride on a passing truck, and returned to Bangalore.

Later that night, they drank more arrack than usual and discussed their little adventure. In another five days, Nagaraja struck again. And again. And again.

Legend has it that the serial killer is a nutcase. In movies, he is traditionally played by a fidgeting, perspiring Anthony Perkins type. In modern fiction, he is either a homosexual who hears voices or even—as in Thomas Harris' bestselling *The Silence of the Lambs*— a cultured doctor who likes to eat the livers of his victims with a small, green salad and a nice, dry Montrachet. In real life, serial killers—ranging from Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, to Raman Raghav, who terrorized Bombay in the 1960s—are considerably more complex and don't fall into single, cinematic categories.

Yet, to be regarded as a serial killer, rather than a simple murderer, a criminal must fulfil certain criteria: he must strike again and again in the same manner, he must commit murder even when there is no real gain and, usually, but not always, the killings must include a sexual component. By that reckoning, Nagaraja is a classic serial killer. So far, he has confessed to twenty-four murders. And the Bangalore Police believe that he could be involved in another twenty. Some cops put the figure closer to fifty.

With one exception, all his victims were women. He nearly always had sex with the women he killed—sometimes with their consent and sometimes without it. The bloodlust became pathological: he murdered when he didn't really need to. Like other serial killers—in fiction and in real life—he was astonishingly shrewd when it came to evading capture. His victims tended to be those society had turfed out: prostitutes, vagrants, rural girls who had taken the train to Bangalore in the hope of making it in the big city. Like Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs*, he took care to zigzag across Karnataka so that the police force of any one geographical area was unable to find a pattern in the killings. And like the Yorkshire Ripper, when he was actually picked up on suspicion of being involved in one of the murders, he talked his way out of police custody.

When did he embark on his reign of terror and what made him do it? The answers to both questions are still not apparent. On 20 May 1989, the partially decomposed body of a woman called Sumathi was found on the outskirts of Bangalore. Nagaraja says she was his first victim, but given that he lies about almost everything, even this is far from certain. Sumathi was just seventeen, suffered from a speech defect and was thought to be slightly soft in the head. She was visiting Bangalore from Kundapura town to see her sister. For some reason, her sister packed her off to see a Kannada film and when she emerged from the theatre, she was terrified by the crowds in Bangalore's busy Majestic area. She considered getting on a bus, wasn't sure which one to take, and wandered around in increasing desperation.

It was then that Nagaraja spotted her. He was with a friend called Chandra and when he realized that she was obviously lost, went up and asked if he could be of any assistance. Yes, oh yes, she said. She had to get back to her sister's place and couldn't remember the way. But of course, Nagaraja and Chandra had no intention of taking her there.

That evening, for the first time, they took a woman to the outskirts of Bangalore. After raping her, Nagaraja pulled off her sari and took her life with it. When Sumathi did not come home that night, her sister filed a 'missing person' complaint at Bangalore's Madivala police station. The police suspected foul play after nothing was heard of Sumathi for days on end. They rounded up all the petty thieves and vagrants of the area. One of them was Nagaraja. If, as he says, this was his first murder, then the prospect of being taken in for questioning by the police should have been fairly traumatic. But Nagaraja was unperturbed.

Police records show that he coolly denied all knowledge of Sumathi, insisted that he had nothing to do with her disappearance, and convinced the normally cynical cops that he had been wrongfully detained. As they had no evidence to suggest otherwise, they let him go. The day Nagaraja walked out of the police station a free man, he knew that he could kill and get away with it. There was nothing to stop him now.

Most serial killers work alone—though many of the policemen involved in the Yorkshire Ripper investigation believe that he had an accomplice part of the time. What makes Nagaraja unusual is that he nearly always managed to drag an acquaintance along. It is not clear whether he told his accomplices that he intended to murder the women. The fact that he kept switching companions suggests that he enticed them to come along, saying that he would stop at rape. What is also unusual is that he robbed his victims of their few personal belongings after he had killed them. Because he was a vagrant with no fixed source of income, he survived by selling the bits of gold that he picked off corpses. Nor does he seem to have shown any willingness to share his booty with his accomplices.

Why did he pick on prostitutes? For the same reason, apparently, that most serial killers (the Yorkshire Ripper or even the legendary Jack the Ripper) prefer street-walkers. A prostitute is much more likely to agree to accompany her would-be murderer to a dark spot. And when she goes missing, society does not notice or care. Moreover, few prostitutes live with their families; so there are fewer people to complain about their absence if they never return from an assignation. So far, Nagaraja has confessed to killing sixteen prostitutes. All were murdered in the same way. He would pick them up, take them somewhere for sex, allow an accomplice to first enjoy them and then combine his own sexual pleasure with the even greater thrill of murder.

Why did he take an accomplice? There are two views. One is that he needed somebody to help overpower the victims if they resisted. But considering that on at least six occasions he acted alone, this does not seem entirely plausible. What is more likely is that he enjoyed the sensation of a gang-bang; that he was a voyeur as well as a murderer and that he enjoyed the sexual humiliation of the women he wished to kill.

All rapists and murderers are not mad. For every Raman Raghav[1], there is a Billa[2] who regards rape and murder as just other crimes to add to his repertoire.

When Nagaraja was five, the family shifted to Bangalore. While Nagaraja was not a major league criminal like Billa (whose history-sheet included car theft, armed robbery and kidnapping) and rarely carried a weapon, he was not mad either. There is nothing in his background to suggest insanity. Some psychologists make out that he had an unhappy childhood, but on closer examination, it does not seem to have been very different from that of others of his background.

Nagaraja alias Kumar alias Selvan was born twenty-seven years ago in the Bandehalli village in Tamil Nadu. His father Kariyappa was a poor stone-cutter with a reputation as a drunkard. He regularly beat up his children: three boys and a girl. Kariyappa tried finding work and when he couldn't, returned to the bottle. His alcoholism soon rendered him unfit for any kind of employment and within a few years, his liver packed up and he died, leaving the family even more destitute.

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[1] The notorious serial killer (d. 1995) active in Bombay in the 1960s and possibly since before, who bludgeoned his victims—slum or pavement dwellers—as they slept. His life was fictionalized in Anurag Kashyap's eponymous film of 2016.

[2] Billa (Jasbir Singh) and his accomplice Ranga (Kuljeet Singh) were hanged in 1982 for the kidnapping and murder of the teenaged siblings Geeta and Sanjay Chopra in Delhi four years earlier.

The young Nagaraja was then left to fend for himself. Nobody is sure what he did for a living. Nagaraja refuses to talk about it, leading the police to suspect that he became a petty thief at an early age. Certainly, three months of intensive investigation have not thrown up a single person who admits to having employed him.

At twenty-three he had a bride, one found for him by his sister: her husband's sister. But his wife never really understood Nagaraja. He told her that he was a lorry driver. However, nobody ever saw the lorry he was supposed to be driving. Nevertheless, he used his mythical occupation as a pretext for disappearing for days on end without warning. When he returned, sometimes flush with funds, his wife would ask where he had been. He would respond that he had driven to Bombay and the money was his remuneration for the job.

Now, Nagaraja denies that he ever drove a truck. So where had he been on those mystery trips? By his own admission, he committed his first murder in April–May 1989. But the mysterious disappearances occurred during 1987–89. Had he actually begun killing during those periods? The police are now trying to find out.

At any rate, the marriage did not last. Nagaraja's disappearances grew longer and longer and finally, one day, he went off for good. According to his confession, he tired of his wife and of the enforced domesticity that marriage brings with it. So he took to hanging around the Bangalore railway station, a paradise for vagrants and petty thieves. It was easy to pick pockets, to rob the suitcases of distracted travellers or to enjoy the favors of the many prostitutes who frequented the area.

During this phase, he fell in with a variety of other small-time criminals. Most came from Tamil Nadu and recognized that the railway station offered a bonanza in the form of strangers to town who were only too glad when one of Nagaraja's accomplices offered to take them around. Invariably, the men were robbed and the women raped—and then robbed. Nobody is sure when murder became part of the modus operandi. Railway stations all over India offer sanctuary to criminals who fleece travellers; but rarely, if ever, is murder part of the deal. Two of his accomplices (Raja and Chandra) told the police that the killings were Nagaraja's idea. He himself admits that while the others may have participated in the rapes, he murdered all the women himself.

The irony is that as long as Nagaraja stuck to prostitutes, he led a charmed life. It was only when he began killing others that the police caught up with him. He admits to having killed only one male. In his confessional statement to the police, he says he was travelling by bus one day when he spotted a man called Basha who, he claims, had once robbed him of his watch, ring and clothes at knife-point, near the Kolar Gold Fields. "I wanted to take revenge," Nagaraja told the police, "so I killed him." But the revenge-killing theory is suspect because here too, the method of death was strangulation (with Basha's own leather belt) and then, having disposed of Basha, he raped and strangled his wife, Noorjehan. It seems more probable that it was Noorjehan he was after and Basha simply got in the way. Even so, despite the hue and cry surrounding the murders of Basha and Noorjehan, Nagaraja eluded the police dragnet. Unfortunately for him, he was not so lucky the next time.

Last year, Nagaraja killed a prostitute in the Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu and then quickly moved out of the area. Along with a friend called Govinda, he landed up in the silk town of Kanakapura, near Bangalore, where Govinda owned a hut in the slum of Ambedkar Nagar. Nobody is certain why Nagaraja went to ground in Kanakapura. Perhaps he sensed that things were getting too hot for him and wanted to take a break from rape and murder.

None of the neighbors suspected that he was a serial killer: he seemed so breathtakingly normal. In fact, Honnaiah, a poor watchman who lived next door to Govinda, was so impressed by Nagaraja that he began thinking of him as a prospective groom for his daughter, Honnamma, who was only eighteen. Nagaraja presented himself as a suitable candidate for marriage. He fell back on his old story about being a truck driver. That explained his transient lifestyle, he said, but at least he was paid well—at this, he flashed a wristwatch and a ring. Honnaiah was still slightly curious. Didn't Nagaraja have any family? Oh no, he said, he was a poor orphan who had been left to fend for himself. Honnaiah's two older daughters—Jayamma and Gowramma—were at once sympathetic. He was the perfect groom for Honnamma, they insisted. In November 1991, Nagaraja got married for the second time and entered a family that doted on him. He had killed over a score of people and had miraculously escaped detection. Now, here was his big chance to go straight at last.

But blood will out. Two months without rape or murder was more than Nagaraja could bear. He needed new victims. He found them a week after the wedding. He told Honnaiah's family that he needed to make a brief trip to Bangalore to fetch a few things. His in-laws agreed and accompanied the newly married couple to the big city. When they reached Nagaraja's old haunt in the Majestic area, the psychopath in him took over. He explained to Honnaiah that all of them could not sit in one autorickshaw. This seemed reasonable enough. But hardly had his father-in-law got into another auto, than Nagaraja's auto sped off with Honnaiah's three daughters in it.

The auto stopped on the outskirts of Bangalore near the paddy fields, adjoining the Bannerghatta National Park. Nagaraja explained to his bride that he would take her sisters to meet his grandmother who lived nearby. Honnamma agreed to wait. But what none of the women knew was that Shangutta, an old murdering accomplice of Nagaraja's, had been tracking them. No sooner had they got to the paddy fields than Shangutta suddenly appeared. The two men grabbed Jayamma and pulled her sari off. Shangutta held Gowramma as she tried to run away.

After that, events followed a familiar course. Both of Nagaraja's sisters-in-law were raped. Both were strangled with their own saris. The murders done, Nagaraja returned nonchalantly to Honnamma, who had patiently waited for them on the main road. "Your sisters have hitched a ride back to Bangalore," he told her. The innocent Honnamma accepted this bizarre explanation and went with her new husband to the village of Kothanur in Dharmapuri district to set up a new home.

Honnaiah was not as trusting as his daughter. When Jayamma and Gowramma did not return, he went to the police. They launched a search. S.K. Venugopal, Bangalore's additional superintendent of police, finally made the connection when he noted that an unidentified body found in the paddy fields had Jayamma's husband's name tattooed on its arm. He asked Honnaiah to identify the corpse. When he did, a full-scale search was launched for Gowramma's body. Once that was found, it was clear that Nagaraja was involved. Armed with a wedding photo provided by Honnaiah, the Bangalore Police launched an intensive search for him. The picture helped and an eyewitness finally recalled a man who resembled Nagaraja in Kothanur.

When the police got there, Nagaraja was sleeping soundly with his wife. He feigned surprise at the presence of the police, while Honnamma loudly proclaimed her husband's innocence. Nagaraja must have known that the game was up. But like the classic psychopath, such was his confidence in himself that he denied everything. He had outwitted the police once and was sure that he could do it again. This time however, the Bangalore Police had smartened up. It was reasonably clear that he had murdered his sisters-in-law, but something told T. Jayaprakash, superintendent of police, Bangalore district, that he was dealing with much more than a simple murderer.

The police team of Venugopal, Jayaprakash and Anekal police station's inspector, K.H. Chandrashekhar, decided that they wouldn't simply announce that they had solved a double murder. Instead, they set out to break Nagaraja. That took three days of intensive interrogation. By the end of November, he had confessed to over twenty murders. Uncharacteristically, the police decided not to rush to the press with the news that they had captured a psychopath. Instead, they spent three months building up a case against him.

Says Jayaprakash, "Fortunately for us, he displayed a remarkable memory." He was cooperative, boastful even, and led the police to each spot and recounted how he had picked up the women and provided details about how he had killed them. Finally, on 1 March, the police went public with their findings. (Because, technically, Nagaraja had been detained illegally, the official story is that he was arrested on 20 February.)

The reaction was immediate. Police forces in other parts of south India sent in reports of unsolved crimes in their jurisdiction and wondered if he was involved. Others recognized the picture and provided details of other murders.

At present, Nagaraja sits quietly in his cell, waiting for his trial. He shows no remorse and remains cannily shrewd.

Always a compulsive liar, he will play games with those who ask him questions. Sometimes he says he is innocent. At others, he admits to two murders, but denies the rest. And so on.

Meanwhile, the police are still compiling the final tally of his murders. If it goes beyond fifty, as many suspect, then he may turn out to have been one of the most notorious, murderer psychopaths in history.

Face to face with a killer

Sunday was the first to meet the 'Bangalore Strangler' in jail when the police finally broke the news of his arrest after three months. And the only publication to have taken photographs of the notorious psychopath awaiting his trial.

Nagaraja looks humble, confused and terribly scared. Certainly not like a maniac with bloody hands. Dressed in a checked lungi and a dirty white polyester shirt, he is brought limping out of his solitary cell. The hands which have strangled so many people to death are folded in total subjugation, and his eyes plead for pity. Cowering in a corner of one of the rooms at the Bangalore Central Jail, he asks meekly, "What do you want from me?"

His mood changes, however, when he sees the photographer taking out his camera. "Can I remove this bandage?" he asks the jailer about the small one on his cheek and poses for his pictures. "I know what is being written in the papers about me," he says softly, "but I haven't killed anyone."

The serial killer, who is under heavy security today, asks, "I have three small daughters. Am I a stone-hearted man to have killed all those women?" The fact is he has no children, though he has two wives. He deserted his first wife, Manjamma, a couple of months after their marriage four years ago. He then wed the eighteen-year-old Honnamma in November last year and was arrested three weeks later. ("I married Honnamma because I did not have any sons from Manju," he says—a blatant lie.)

"Manju and my daughters used to visit me every day at the Anekal police station and they used to bring me lunch," he says with conviction. The fact is that Manjamma visited him exactly once at the station and she has no children. It would be very easy to believe Nagaraja, who paints a pathetic picture of himself. "I have never killed. I have never set eyes on any one woman the police say I have killed," he says.

Reconstructing what happened, he recounts, "I came to Bangalore to pawn a ring at Chickpet and heard that my father-in-law had lodged a complaint with the police saying Jayamma and Gowramma were missing. I was told that the Anekal police had kept Jayamma at the station. I took Honnamma along with me to the station. There, the police told me that they would give me lots of money. They got me drunk and took me to different places. They forced me to say that I killed all the women."

He shows a good memory when he says, "The police kept me for three months and four days and then brought me here (Central Jail)." But next comes another lie: "The police never arrested me. I went to the station on my own." The police have refuted this claim. Even Honnamma's father, Honnaiah, says he was with the police when they arrested a drunk Nagaraja at midnight in Kothanur, on the outskirts of Bangalore. "He was fast asleep and the police went into the house since the door was left open. They woke him and Honnamma up and beat Nagaraja before taking him to the station," remembers Honnaiah.

Nagaraja is adept at lying. But he often gives contradictory versions of events. In his sixteen-page confession, he says Shangutta was with him when he committed the last two murders (of Jayamma and Gowramma). *Sunday* got to see a copy of the statement in which he says, "Shangutta wanted to sleep with Jayamma and Gowramma, but I took them away along with Honnamma. Shangutta followed us and when I took Gowramma and Jayamma into the fields, both of us attacked them, had sex, and I strangled them both."

But at the jail, Nagaraja told *Sunday*, "Shangutta took them in an auto and killed them. The blame has come on me now." The auto does not figure in his confession. Another version has it that he and another accomplice, Gopal, got drunk and killed them. The police, however, maintain that both the murders were committed by Nagaraja alone—as well as the strangling of the other twenty-two people.

Asked specifically how he got implicated if he was innocent, he just wails for Shangutta and Gopal, his accomplices, who are still absconding. "Shangutta, Shangutta," he cries and lapses into silence. After that no amount of coaxing or threats can force him to say anything more. He just keeps quiet and stares blankly at the interviewer.

For about fifteen minutes, he sits silently, looking into space. The jailer arms himself with a lathi. When it becomes apparent that he will not talk any more, the policeman asks him to get up and leave. Near the door, he turns around and adds a parting shot: "Whatever I say, you will not believe me. What more can I say?"

15–21 March 1992, *Sunday*

Editor's note: *Nagaraj escaped police custody in November 1993 and* *was not apprehended till February the following year. In the interim he reverted to his old stratagems, marrying yet again to acquire a camouflage, and was caught trying to sell the jewelry of his mother-in-law, whom he had smothered to death.*

Bungle in Bangalore: Rajiv deposes Patil

It used to be said of Indira Gandhi that her imperiousness never allowed her to be spontaneous in public. Every statement, no matter how trivial, was always part of a power play. Even a paper called "Stray Thoughts" turned out to be the opening salvo in the battle to control the Congress in 1969.

Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other hand, frequently spoke his mind without fully evaluating the consequences. He led an unprepared nation into a disastrous conflict by suddenly declaring at an airport press conference in 1962 that he had ordered the Indian Army to "throw out the Chinese".

Last fortnight, it became clear that Rajiv Gandhi has inherited his mother's imperiousness and his grandfather's spontaneity. There was something of Indira Gandhi in the regal manner in which he summarily dismissed Veerendra Patil, the chief minister of Karnataka. But the lasting aftertaste was of Nehru's grandson making his own gaffe at another airport press conference twenty-eight years later. Even before the chief minister could make his announcement (and, according to Patil, even before he had been informed of his impending departure), the Congress president took it upon himself to declare that he was replacing the chief minister.

The throwaway nature of the remark—made to the press at Bangalore airport before Rajiv boarded a flight to Delhi—took Karnataka's breath away. It also plunged the state into a constitutional crisis. Patil claimed that Rajiv had not consulted him before making his announcement and questioned the former prime minister's right to dismiss him anyway. Constitutionally speaking, Patil was in the right—the chief minister is elected by the largest party in the Karnataka assembly, not by the member of parliament for Amethi, Uttar Pradesh—and when he refused to resign, there was little that Rajiv could do.

As the deadlock continued, Bhanu Pratap Singh, a Janata Dal drudge who had been appointed governor of Karnataka by V.P. Singh, decided to step in. Patil wrote to him demanding that the assembly be dissolved. This gave the governor the opportunity he needed. Shortly after receiving Patil's letter, he dismissed the state government, suspended the assembly and declared president's rule. When the Congress responded with outrage, Singh feigned incredulity. He had only suspended the assembly, he declared; Patil had wanted him to dissolve it.

Surely, he ought to be congratulated on his moderation, not condemned for arbitrariness. As the charade went on, it was clear that this was one situation in which everybody had behaved badly. Patil had failed to keep under check the riots in Ramanagaram, known as the silk town of the state—Hindu–Muslim clashes broke out on 2 September this year around Ganesh festivities, and then spread to Channapatana, claiming seven lives in all—and, further, he had misled the state about the seriousness of his illness. Rajiv Gandhi had been imperious and indiscreet. And the governor had functioned as a Janata Dal partisan and not as the protector of the Constitution.

Many explanations were offered. The most obvious one came from Patil's supporters who said that Rajiv had never liked the former chief minister's insistence on functioning independently. Earlier this year, there was a mini-crisis when Patil flew to Delhi to seek Rajiv's permission for a cabinet expansion. According to the Karnataka MLAs, Rajiv kept him waiting for days for an appointment and then, insisted that he include the likes of S. Bangarappa in his ministry. Patil resented being pushed around, but Rajiv saw it differently. He felt that Patil would never have won the election as leader of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) on his own and that he owed his position to the high command. Therefore, he ought to clear every important decision with New Delhi.

Certainly Patil made no attempt to conceal his resentment at the manner in which he was being treated. He regarded Rajiv as arrogant and believed that he was being wrongly briefed by other Congress factions at the behest of the liquor lobby. His view—expressed most strongly after president's rule was declared—was that he had improved the state's financial position by launching an excise crackdown on liquor barons such as the Khodays.

Once Rajiv announced his dismissal, Patil's supporters attributed the former prime minister's action to bribes from liquor manufacturers. The Karnataka finance ministry under Rajashekhar Murthy—who remained a Patil loyalist till the end—had raised over Rs 360 crores by cracking down on the sale of seconds (liquor on which excise is evaded). According to the Patil camp, the liquor barons paid Rs 25 crores to ensure the chief minister's dismissal and promised the Congress regular monthly payments of Rs 2 crores. Bizarre as it may sound, this explanation was being taken seriously in Bangalore last week. Why else had Rajiv behaved so badly, asked Patil's supporters. After all, they added, he had made only a brief tour of the riot-hit areas and spent more time confabulating with the chief minister's detractors.

While such rumors made the rounds, everybody ignored the obvious explanation: Patil's background. Both of the Congress' other chief ministers—Sharad Pawar and Chenna Reddy—are men who were used to Indira Gandhi's style of functioning. Thus, while Sharad Pawar might talk big about his own base in Maharashtra, he is still comfortable with the chief minister-high command relationship evolved by Indira Gandhi in the seventies. The same is true of Chenna Reddy in Andhra Pradesh. Veerendra Patil, on the other hand, was a Congress (O) chief minister of Karnataka after the party split in 1964. He belonged to the Syndicate tradition of powerful local leaders to whom New Delhi deferred. He was never comfortable with Indira Gandhi's style of functioning—in fact, he contested against her from Chikmagalur during the Janata period—and she, in turn, preferred to rely on the Gundu Rao kind of obliging strongman.

In today's Congress (I), no local leader can aspire to the prominence of the Syndicate era. The party in each state consists of a coalition with factions headed by various contenders for the chief ministership coming together to support the high command's choice for the job. Because Patil and Rajiv belonged to different political traditions, a clash was inevitable. Afterwards, Patil's supporters pointed out that Andhra's Chenna Reddy had been allowed to go abroad for medical treatment for a year while his state was rocked by naxalite violence. So why was Patil treated differently?

The argument missed the point. Reddy understood today's Congress (I) and cleared his departure with both Rajiv and R.K. Dhawan [a close aide of Indira Gandhi who became Rajiv's confidant]. Patil, on the other hand, did not believe that his health was any concern of Rajiv Gandhi's or of his factotums. This stance only increased his alienation from the men around the Congress (I) president. R.K. Dhawan, for instance, has never forgotten that Patil was the man who fought Mrs Gandhi at Chikmagalur, and would be much happier with the likes of Gundu Rao.

Then Patil committed his biggest mistake. When other Karnataka Congress (I) leaders sent an SOS to Rajiv, Patil told him that there was no need for him to visit the state. Rajiv insisted on coming anyway and asked for the use of the state government helicopter. He was told that it was under repair and so could he please use a car instead. Thus, the Congress (I) president arrived in Karnataka angry and resentful. He was certain that Patil was hiding something. When he learned that the chief minister was in much worse health than he had let on and the riot situation was not under control, he flew into a rage. Once that happened, Patil's fate was sealed.

But so great was the difference in traditions that despite Rajiv's public announcement that the chief minister would be replaced, Patil still believed that he could hang on and win the support of the legislators. It was a vain hope and, finally, Patil came to terms with the fact that it was Indira Gandhi's Congress—with its autocratic ways—that had won the battle in 1969, and not his Congress (O).

When Rajiv fired Patil, there was widespread support for the chief minister throughout Karnataka. Said K.H. Srinivas, a Patil supporter within the Congress (I): "There should be some self-respect within the party. This is not the way of doing things. You can't dismiss and humiliate the chief minister." Others claimed that Kannadiga pride had been hurt just as the people of Andhra had felt humiliated when Rajiv [then Congress general secretary] had shouted at T. Anjaiah [Andhra Pradesh chief minister] at the Hyderabad airport [in 1982].

But even as a groundswell of resentment was building up, V.P. Singh made an even bigger mistake than Rajiv Gandhi. Governor of Karnataka, seventy-year-old Bhanu Pratap Singh, whom the Janata Dal government had appointed, was vacationing in Gonda district (UP) when the crisis broke.

The Raja of Manda, as prime minister Singh is known, sent a special plane to fetch him to New Delhi and briefed him. It is not known what transpired between the two men, but it is reasonably certain that the prime minister phoned Veerendra Patil and promised him 'all support'. Janata Dal sources say that V.P. Singh only meant the support of Janata Dal MLAs in the Karnataka assembly (a mere twenty-four), but Congressmen hint darkly that the Raja was offering more substantial assistance—help from the governor he had nominated.

Certainly Patil—who had objected to Bhanu Pratap Singh's appointment—now began to regard the governor as his friend, writing him letters insisting that he either be allowed to stay on or the state assembly be dissolved. In reality, the governor's options were limited. If the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) indicated that it backed Rajiv and not Patil, then he had little choice but to call on whoever the CLP chose as its new leader to form the government. Within a day it was clear the CLP thought that Patil was through—even K.H. Srinivas, who had talked of 'self-respect', now called for the chief minister's removal.

But Bhanu Pratap Singh had other ideas. Perhaps at the behest of his masters in New Delhi, he declared that any CLP meeting that was not called by Patil was unconstitutional. ("How has he read the Constitution of the Karnataka CLP when we don't have one?" joked Rajiv Gandhi.) And then alleging horse-trading—for which he had no evidence—he called for the imposition of president's rule. Delhi backed him to the hilt, featuring both the governor and the deposed chief minister on Doordarshan news with obliging regularity. The governor's position was untenable.

As the uproar over his actions mounted it became clear that he would have to give in and appoint whoever the CLP selected as its leader. But because he had acted in haste, his intervention served to divert attention from Rajiv's bungling. Now, it became a constitutional issue and even the National Front's allies in parliament—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Bharatiya Janata Party—condemned the imposition of president's rule. In the melee, everybody forgot that this was an avoidable crisis set off by Rajiv Gandhi's tendency to shoot from the hip. In a bizarre twist, V.P. Singh had come to Rajiv's aid.

With Karnataka under president's rule, the CLP turned to the immediate task at hand: the election of a new leader. The first candidate in the fray was Gundu Rao, the former wrestler and Sanjay Gandhi loyalist, who had been chief minister from 1980 to 1983. Rao had left the Congress after abusing Rajiv, but once he was readmitted, he found himself entirely at home with the likes of R.K. Dhawan. Though Dhawan pushed for Rao's candidacy, Rajiv was adamant: having been accused of imperiousness once, he was not going to behave arbitrarily. So, the CLP was told to elect its own leader and warned that the traditional Congress formulation of "we will leave it to our beloved Rajiv-ji" would not be allowed. This time, Rajiv wanted a democratically elected leader. There was just one problem with this approach: no single politician could claim that he had the loyalty of a majority of MLAs.

Among the contenders for the chief ministership—in addition to Gundu Rao—were Veerappa Moily, K.H. Patil and S. Bangarappa. Though each could claim a significant block of support, the CLP was too divided for any one of them to achieve even a simple majority. Thus the CLP failed to come up with a leader and the MLAs reverted to the chant of "Let Rajiv-ji decide!" Some even went so far as to insist that if there was a secret ballot, they would write 'Rajiv Gandhi' in the allotted space. Finally, Rajiv agreed to a compromise. The new chief minister would be the man who got the most votes even if these fell short of a majority. The observers dispatched by the high command from New Delhi met each MLA individually and ascertained the pattern of support. They concluded that S. Bangarappa had the most support, Moily was second and Patil third.

Where did this leave Gundu Rao? According to one version, Rao and Bangarappa had done a deal whereby Gundu Rao's MLAs would opt for Bangarappa. In return, the new leader would accommodate Gundu Rao's men and interests in his ministry. Once Bangarappa had emerged as the leader with the most support, the CLP put on a facade of unanimity. Moily proposed Bangarappa's name, Patil seconded it and the 57-year-old leader was declared 'unanimously elected'.

It now looks as though Bangarappa will be the next chief minister of Karnataka. On Sunday, 14 October, governor Bhanu Pratap Singh told a press conference that he was recommending that president's rule be withdrawn. He defended the decision to suspend the assembly but argued that now that it was clear that Bangarappa had the support of the CLP, he would have no difficulty in inviting him to form the government. Should that happen, it will be third time lucky for the veteran Karnataka politician. In 1980, he opposed Devraj Urs and expected to be appointed chief minister by the Congress (I). He was passed over in favor of Gundu Rao and left to form a new political party, Kranti Ranga. In 1983, his new party allied with the Janata Party to defeat Rao's Congress, but once again, he missed his chance and watched helplessly as Chandra Shekhar nominated Ramakrishna Hegde to become the state's chief minister. Bangarappa rejoined the Congress and became leader of the opposition in the assembly till he was removed after a court passed strictures against him. He was replaced by Veerappa Moily. So, Bangarappa must have taken a particular pleasure in defeating Moily in the leadership elections.

If all goes well, then Karnataka may have had the shortest spell of president's rule in Indian history. But for Rajiv Gandhi, the episode should have proved at least one thing: act like your mother and you will end up with those (Gundu Rao and Bangarappa) who hung around her.

21–27 October 1990, *Sunday*

Padshahnama: A brush with royalty

When the *Padshahnama* arrived in India early this year, few Indians saw it. Certainly fewer protested. Most didn't even know it was on display. Early in June, the profusely illustrated manuscript commissioned by the emperor Shah Jahan, was being shown at the Smithsonian's Sackler Gallery in Washington DC. Americans turned out in large numbers to admire the seventeenth century manuscript.

Not all the reactions were favorable though. Jone Maliha, a resident of the American capital, found it "upsetting" to see a specimen of "greatest Indian art exhibited as the wealth of Queen Elizabeth". "She should return this stolen property to India," he added emphatically. A group of protesters, who called themselves The Committee for the Restoration of the Indian Subcontinent's Past, echoed similar sentiments.

When the maharaja of the erstwhile Marwar–Jodhpur kingdom, the forty-nine-year-old Gaj Singh II, and his wife Maharani Hemlata Rajye arrived to inaugurate the exhibition last month, members of the committee staged a demonstration in front of the gallery, demanding that the *Padshahnama* be returned to India. While the controversy goes on, connoisseurs of art in the US can't seem to get enough of this rare opportunity to view the priceless work. Cary Watkins of California found the *Padshahnama* "unbelievably incredible!"

As for the paintings, the comment book was crowded with superlatives—'Beautiful', 'Breathtaking', 'Fabulous' and so on. The *Padshahnama* (which translates from Persian as The chronicle of the emperor of the world) amply deserves all the adulation. It can be loosely deemed as a family album, written and illustrated between the 1630s and 1650s. Its forty-four paintings provide glimpses of the pomp and splendour of the Mughal kingdom, especially during Shah Jahan's reign.

Apart from the historical value, what makes it precious is the way it has been illustrated. It becomes obvious that the painters in Shah Jahan's court did not believe in shortcuts. The minutest of details are carefully etched out in every painting, be it the designs on sword sheaths, or the tiniest tendril of the plumes on the emperor's crown, or the 'jalis' of balconies where the royalty sat, or the floral designs on carpets. Every millimeter of the paintings has been painstakingly crafted in glorious detail.

Paul Richard, the art critic of *The Washington Post*, went into raptures: "The pictures that are seen on television screens are stacks of flickering lines, the photographs presented in newspapers and magazines dissolve into dots. The pictures of the *Padshahnama* have none of that mechanical blur. It's as if they have been unveiled. The more intently you look at them, the more it is you see." Which is why the Sackler thoughtfully provides huge magnifying glasses to visitors. Through them, one can see not just the details in the foreground showing royal courts or battlefields, but even farmers tilling land in the distance and life inside a fortress beyond the main scene. The really keen observer is able to spot the gruesome droplets of blood sticking on to the legs of flies hovering over decapitated heads.

Milo Beach, director of the Sackler and Freer Galleries, has been instrumental in bringing the *Padshahnama* outside and taking it across the world, including to India. The manuscript had been lying at the Royal Library all these years. This is the first and perhaps the last time it has been on view for the public. Beach, who has studied the paintings microscopically, believes the exhibition will help tourists to India understand the history of the country better. "Casual visitors to India encounter the monuments of Shah Jahan more frequently than those of any other period," he says in the foreword to the exhibition catalogue. "The Taj Mahal and the forts in Agra and Delhi are on every tourist itinerary. The *Padshahnama* provides an unrivalled opportunity to understand better the peoples and ceremonies that enlivened those spaces."

If the *Padshahnama* depicts history, like all things precious, it has a history of its own. The story of how it left the country and became a part of the British Royal collection is no less intriguing. Shortly after the decline of the Mughal empire in the eighteenth century, the manuscript went into the hands of the Nawab of Awadh who bought it for 12,000 rupees. He first tried to present it to the then governor general of India, Lord Teignmouth, who turned down the offer, saying it was "fit for a royal collection". The Nawab, anxious to please, took the hint and sent it across to King George III in 1797.

Besides the *Padshahnama*, the Sackler and its adjacent Freer Gallery have exhibited a few more things Indian. One of them is *Gulistan*, a Persian manuscript which is older than the *Padshahnama*. Smaller in size and just as detailed as the *Padshahnama* paintings, this one was illustrated in the thirteenth century and had belonged to emperor Akbar. It was inherited by Shah Jahan and passed on to his daughter, Jahanara Begum, and almost got burnt in a fire.

Another is the 141.13 carat hexagonal Taj Mahal emerald. Shah Jahan, known for his obsession for precious gems which had led to the creation of the fabled peacock throne, had worn it around his neck. Carved sometime in the early seventeenth century with an intagliated scrolling vine and stylized flowers, this gem had been one of the highlights of Cartier's display at an exhibition in Paris in 1925. Lastly, there are the fifteen decorative borders making up another exhibition titled 'At the Margins' which opened last week. These are the works of artists who supplemented the paintings with elegant borders.

The *Padshahnama* will be touring the United States right up to the end of next year as part of programmes celebrating India's fiftieth year of independence. And judging by popular reaction, the controversy over where the manuscript belongs has had little effect on the tremendous interest the exhibition has generated. While it is going to be a "once in a lifetime experience to sec the greatest examples of Mughal paintings" for Americans like Liza Booth, people from the Indian subcontinent are welcoming it too. As Prakash Kamat, an American of Indian descent, puts it: "I really appreciate the chance to see the *Padshahnama*." And, for Pakistan-born Iqbal Khan, "The *Padshahnama* paintings are a wonderful opportunity to explore my own heritage."

The question as to whether the *Padshahnama* should be returned to India seems to be the least of their worries, at the moment.

29 June–5 July 1997, *Sunday*

An interview

‘Being a woman is my security right now’

Journalist M.D. Riti did this interview with Gauri Lankesh in March 2000, two months after Gauri became editor of *Lankesh Patrike.*

Did you ever think that you would be the inheritor of your father’s legacy and that you would become the editor of Lankesh Patrike *some day?*

Never. I don’t think, for one thing, that anyone could ever be the true inheritor of my father’s legacy. He was so huge in the worlds of Kannada journalism and literature. On the day he died, my friends asked me, as we waited at the Delhi airport, what is going to happen to the *Patrike* now. I told them there was no question of ever doing anything other than shutting it down pronto. His shoes were just too big and difficult to fill.

What were the circumstances under which you decided to edit the weekly?

I didn’t think it would ever be feasible, at first, to run the paper under anyone else’s stewardship, leave alone mine, because everyone would want to see another Lankesh, which is impossible. But so many people sent messages saying, please don’t shut the paper down because it has always stood for secularism, dalits, women and the downtrodden. The *Patrike* had become a forum for voices that mainstream media had no space for.

My sister, brother and I all went to meet my father's dear friend Mani, the editor and publisher of leading Kannada eveninger, *Sanje Vani*, and the Tamil daily, *Dina Sudar*, who has been printing our magazine for years. We told him we wanted to close the paper down. Mani was quite upset. He said, "There was your father, who quit his regular job, put all his savings into starting this publication, and had the courage to struggle and make it into something. You people now want to give it up without even a struggle. Why don't you at least have the guts to try it for a while, and close it down if it doesn't work out?" Then again, the circumstances under which my father called it a day seemed almost like a portent. He died on a Monday, after he had written all his columns and put the edition to bed. It seemed almost like an insult to his memory to close down the magazine abruptly, when he had wound up his affairs so neatly. One question that continued to worry us was whether my father would have wanted the *Patrike* to continue. We still don't know the answer. He never told us.

Even though he was ill for so long? He never discussed its future with any of you?

No, in fact he was toying with the idea of starting an evening newspaper over the past two years. We all shot the idea down at home because we didn't think he had the health to do it. He always felt he wanted it to be alive as long as it was serving a purpose. And I think it still is serving one.

So you never got into journalism with the idea of taking the weekly over some day?

Was I being groomed for this job? Certainly not, because my father started the paper at the same time that I started studying journalism. There was nothing for me to inherit at that point in terms of a publication. Actually, my first choice of profession was to be a doctor, but it didn't happen, so I decided to become a journalist. In all these twenty years, I wrote for the *Patrike* just once. I deliberately kept myself away from the publication because it is such a strident, hard-hitting paper, and I was working for the mainstream English media.

Your critics point out that your career graph has been far from spectacular, and that for the past decade your career has been either stagnating or going downhill. Do you think this was a lucky break for you?

I would be the first person to admit that my career was stagnating like nobody's business. Perhaps it was because I did not want to take risks. Maybe it was because my personal life has not exactly been terrific. I was concentrating more on finding personal happiness than on chasing a career. Today, I am happy with myself, and don't mind the price I have had to pay for it.

Are you happy with both your personal and professional lives now?

As a person I am very happy with myself now. Last year I decided that I finally had no problems with being alone, had resolved all my personal confusions, and was ready to concentrate on my career. At this time, my father's death decided the matter for me, and I had to come back when my career was really taking off. As for this editorship, I don't think at all that I have earned it. I am just doing my best to make sure that I do earn it now.

What are your plans for the Patrike *now?*

My father did give the paper its direction until the very end.

But over the past two years, as his health failed, the paper had stopped really touching its readers. I am trying to reach out to the people again now.

As the second generation of family running this paper, do you plan to take the publication in any other directions, make its reach more global, put it online or whatever?

My father was averse to technology. He was most conservative in that area. Until the very end, he wrote in his own hand. He never understood the internet or even the stock market. He felt strongly that change can best be implemented at a micro level. I agree with his point of view, but I also realize that the micro level is also getting technology savvy. Once we stabilize, I do plan to put the *Patrike* on the internet, and also some of my father's other written works. Right now, I am serializing one of his novels, and hope to put that serial on the internet too.

Will you have an online edition of the Patrike?

We discovered that someone had already registered a website in the name of *Lankesh Patrike*. It has nothing on it except for a picture of my father. My brother wrote to the man who had the site, and it turned out to belong to a fan of my father. He told us that we could have it any time we wanted. We plan to activate that site in a few weeks from now.

How do you like being the editor of a weekly with a very male identity, in terms of its readership, its staff, and its leadership right until now?

Women might have their spaces in the *Patrike*, but the focus is definitely hard news, investigation and typically male areas of interest, with the kind of stories that male journalists in the districts mostly do. I disagree with the statement that our readership is largely male. We have given birth to some of the best women writers in Kannada too. Like Vaidehi, Lalitha Naik and Bhanu Mushtaq. They still prefer to publish with us first as we give them a very special readership. My father also inspired so many women to become journalists in Kannada.

Your father frequently faced threats to his life, law suits, was called all sorts of names. He took all these in his stride. As a fairly young single woman, living alone in Bangalore, are you up to withstanding such pressure?

For all the people who filed cases against my father, there were a far greater number who refrained from doing so because they felt he was right. I am trying to run the weekly much more professionally without losing its sting. I think being a woman is quite useful in this situation, because if any of our reporters met a politician who was angry with my father, the politician would use the foulest language against him. But if they badmouth a woman, they will lose respect and face in society themselves! So being a woman is my security right now.

Well, people may not badmouth you, but your being a woman may not dissuade them from attacking you physically, as they tried to attack your father from time to time. They will know you are particularly vulnerable as you are single and living alone.

I am not afraid of physical attacks at all. I used to come home at 3 a.m. alone many nights until a fortnight ago. I only stopped when I saw a man wrapped in a sari lying in the middle of the road on one such occasion. Now I keep my driver with me until I reach home. Apart from that, I have not even got any blank calls. I have received a couple of calls trying to blackmail me about my personal life in taluk level 'blackmail' newspapers. Those too stopped when I said, "Go ahead. Write whatever you want about me. I have done nothing wrong to fear exposure."

When you speak of running the paper more professionally, do you mean that it will become less of a tabloid and more upmarket?

There is nothing tabloidy or downmarket about us apart from our A4 size. And we are not a highly priced paper, of course. Those people that we criticize like to dismiss us as a yellow tabloid, when we catch them doing wrong things. We have always taken the risk of telling things as they are.

Bringing out a publication in a vernacular language calls for a very high skill level in that language. Do you have that degree of comfort working in Kannada?

I hope so. Not a single word has gone into the paper that I have not personally seen and approved in the past two months. My father felt that English was the language of expression of the superficial and highly styled Indian. He always told me that no true self expression can come in a language that is not Indian. I now find that he is quite right. After almost two decades of writing and thinking in English, I find that the opportunity to write in Kannada has given me so much spontaneity and freedom of expression.

15 March 2000, *Rediff.com*

Journalism in Kannada

Noor's heartbeat

Every evening, a peculiar convention takes place at Wagah, a village along the India-Pakistan border. The border gates of both countries stand five feet apart. Flags of both countries flutter nearby. On occasion, the soldiers on either side of the border ask after one another: "Good day! How are you?" When I visited Wagah in 1999, a senior Indian Army officer introduced me to his Pakistani counterpart. I stepped inside the no-man's land between the two countries. The Pakistani Army officer came forward. We shook hands even as the two countries were at war in the northern mountains of Kargil (in the disputed Kashmir region).

Amicable with one another during the day, the soldiers of both countries get into a kind of contest as the evening sets in. Ordinary Indians and Pakistanis gather near the gates and the daily ritual of lowering the national flags commences. (A choreographed exercise follows as both Indian and Pakistani soldiers stomp their boots angrily.) On which side were the soldiers more bellicose? On which side were they stomping their boots more vehemently and loudly? Mindful of details like these, the citizens clap and shout slogans and root for the soldiers from their country. It begins to feel as if a small war is about to break out between the soldiers.

A strange sight follows: after the flag-lowering ritual is over, Indians and Pakistanis rush toward the border gates. They stare at one another curiously. A sense of rivalry isn't seen among them. A 'you are just like us' sentiment prevails instead. Hoping to see relatives separated from them at the time of the partition in 1947, some Indians and Pakistanis visit the Wagah border time and again. They stand in silence searching for a familiar face on the other side of the border and head home only when the soldiers drive them away.

Noor Fatima brought back these memories. News of her successful surgery has spread far. What I liked most though was the moral and economic support that Indians have extended to her. They offered her the help that politicians were unable to give. Noor's parents welcomed it graciously.

Numerous Indians have donated money to the Dosti Fund (Friendship Fund) that Noor's father set up to offer aid to poor Indian children. An industrialist, who had lived in Lahore before migrating to India after Partition, offered 12 lakh rupees. This act of generosity from an Indian Hindu to a fund set up by a Pakistani Muslim demonstrates that the people of the two countries need friendship and harmonious coexistence.

At a time when efforts to divide people in the country along lines of caste and religion are underway, ordinary Indians have proved that they won't let religious difference divide them. The Noor episode clarifies that India's hostility toward Pakistan is limited to its own security and does not extend to the people of that country or their religion.

Indians ignored the fact that young Noor is from another country. Those Indians who hesitated to come out in support of Muslim victims of the Gujarat violence stood in support of a Muslim girl from Pakistan. Our hearts don't have to be filled with hatred. Noor made us see that.

Editor's note: In 2003, the parents of two-year-old Noor Fatima brought her to Narayana Hrudalaya, a cardiac care hospital in

Bengaluru, for an open-heart surgery. Launched in 1999, the Dosti Bus (Friendship Bus) between Delhi and Lahore, which remained the only mode of transport between Pakistan and India at the time—air and rail travel having been suspended after the 2001 suicide attack on the Indian Parliament—made possible their visit to India. Noor's visit to Bengaluru gained high media attention and drew good wishes and offers of financial assistance from far and wide. News of her successful surgery was met with cheer. When the hospital waived the expenses of the surgery, Noor's father used the waived amount to set up a fund there for the treatment of heart ailments of poor Indian children.

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Translated by Chandan Gowda

What I saw in Bababudangiri

Such amazing things happened over the two weeks when we organized communal harmony meetings at Chikmagalur and Bababudangiri, and called upon people to stop Karnataka from becoming another Gujarat and Bababudangiri from being turned into Ayodhya by the saffron brigade... I am confused about where to even begin!

The writer Girish Karnad, who had already expressed his support to protecting Bababudangari, a symbol of harmony, called me up and asked, "Shall we make a trip there to understand the ground reality before the communal harmony conference on December 7 and 8?"

"It's a beautiful idea, let's go," I said. Karnad, Dr K. Marulasiddappa, G.K. Govind Rao, Shudra Shrinivas, Professor V.S. Sridhara and I headed to Chikmagalur in a Tata Qualis.

On the way we discussed the uniqueness of Bababudangiri and the poisonous environment being created around it by the saffron brigade. It is no secret that the monkeys of the Bajrang Dal are gearing up to create disruptions at Bababudangiri this year. The slogans of the Bajrang Dal last year testify this. Shridhar showed me the photos taken last year. One of the photos had a banner with the slogan: Committed to friendship, Ready to Kill!

Karnad was furious when he saw it. He thundered, "Whom do they want to kill? Look at the words used here: 'A piece of flesh,' 'streams of blood', 'destroy the enemies." Is this even Kannada?" Marulasiddappa remarked, "Our culture was shaped by Basavanna, Sharif, Kanakadasa and Kuvempu. 'Compassion is the root of religion'... This is our Karnataka's religion. But these Bajrang Dal types know only the language of Modi and Togadia."

That photo had also captured the 'demands' of the Bajrang Dal—offering exclusive worship at Dattapitha, the installation of an idol, the appointment of a priest, the removal of the tombs around Dattapitha and the declaration of the entire region as a holy place for the Hindus.

The Bajrang Dal has made the same demands this year too. The Bharatiya Janata Party has declared its full support for them.

But every demand of the Bajrang Dal stands in direct contravention of the Supreme Court's judgment. Meeting even one of these demands would amount to contempt of court. It is no surprise that the ignorant BJP supporters are unaware of this.

We discussed the Supreme Court's judgment on Bababudangiri. According to this judgment, only the rituals that were practised till June 1975 can be continued and no new rituals are to be allowed. It had also listed the religious practices that were being followed in Bababudangiri.

Many of the rituals seen in Hindu temples are followed here. They are:

1. Offering flowers to the paadukas [footwear of the godhead].
2. Lighting the lamp.
3. Giving theertha [holy water] to the devotees.
4. Breaking coconuts as an offering.
5. Paying respects to the religious heads of Hindu mathas.
6. Blessing devotees by stroking their heads with peacock feathers.

The judges of the Supreme Court who gave the judgement [in 1975] extolled the goodwill prevailing between the Hindu and Muslim devotees in relation to this holy shrine. Their judgement noted that while talk of Ram-Rahim was often a cliché, it was a living tradition here.

The judges further said that above all, one needs to appreciate the stand taken by the shakhadri, the hereditary administrator of the shrine. Himself a Muslim, he had said that this holy space does not belong to just Muslims but as much to Hindu devotees. It is to be equally appreciated that Hindus, who are petitioners, have not claimed that the place is exclusively of the Hindus even though it has paadukas and nanda deepa.

The Muslims who have been worshipping at this place for hundreds of years have never claimed this space exclusively for themselves, the court noted. The Wakf Board, meanwhile, is trying to stake a claim over this space. When the world is falling apart because of fissures between religions and castes, this contentious centre, Guru Dattatreya Bababudanswamy Dargah, is a great example of real secularism, the judges said.

It is an act of evil that in such a place, an orthodox Hindu party like the BJP and the hell raising-arm, the Bajrang Dal, are demanding the appointment of a priest (I need not clarify separately that it will be a brahmin), the razing of tombs and designating the shrine area as a holy Hindu site.

Girish Karnad ridiculed the whole idea, saying, "Datta Jayanti or Datta Maala are not our tradition at all. It is not religion but politics in the name of religion that is behind such practices. It is very easy to understand the conspiracy behind brahminizing the Dattatreya of the Natha tradition who had rejected the caste system."

The Guru Dattatreya Bababudanswamy Dargah has its own history. Dada Hayat, who had come to Chandra Drona Mountain from Arabia, won the appreciation of shudras and dalits, then suffering at the hands of local chieftains, by helping them. Some, impressed by the love, compassion, and tolerance shown by Dada Hayat, converted to Islam while many others became devotees of Dada Hayat without severing ties with their old religion, but by calling him an avatar of Dattatreya himself. There is a reason for this too. In Hindu mythology, Vishnu takes the avatar of Dattatreya to free people from slavery. So the Hindu devotees saw Dattatreya in Dada Hayat and gave him a Hindu name. It was common to give Muslim Sufi saints Hindu names back then. For example, Bijapur's Sufi saint Khwaja Ameenuddin Allah was called Brahmanandayike Swamy by the Hindu devotees and Tintini's Moiddeen was 'Hinduized' as Muniyappa.

In due course, the two names Dada Hayat and Dattatreya became one, and in the land documents of the dargah, the shakhadri came to be called "Jagadguru." Both Hindu and Muslim kings have been devotees of this place for centuries. There was a steady flow of money to this dargah during Rani Chennamma's time. Haider Ali also provided resources for its upkeep. Tipu Sultan granted hundreds of acres of land. Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar III visited the dargah multiple times for religious counsel from the 'pir'. Not just that, the Mysore king provided special privileges to sixteen Hindu religious authorities and Shri Guru Dattatreya Bababudanswamy Jagadguru. No other Muslim religious head was given this privilege.

In such a place the saffron brigade now wants homa, yoga, yagna, pooja… and such other pointless rituals.

3 December 2003, *Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Sudhamshu Mitra

Conviviality in jail

Harmony between communities characterizes the culture of Karnataka and most people in the state aspire to preserve it. Proof of this is the great support for the 'Harmony Convention' at Chikmagalur held by various organizations seen across the state, and for those who went to jail following the event.

The convention of 7 December 2003 and the two-day stay in jail afterwards were unforgettable experiences. When the district administration halted our march in the city and took hundreds into custody, we all went to jail singing the famous song in unison, "Rebuild! We shall rebuild… the broken hearts and the lofty dreams…We shall surely rebuild…" My eyes grow moist even now when I recall that day.

As the police took us in a crowded bus to the newly built Chikmagalur jail and we waved white flags and threw pamphlets out of the window all the way, it struck me that the government that wanted to stop our procession had actually facilitated it by taking us through all the main streets of the town. We would have probably got less attention had we walked the streets instead.

The jail was new, but lacked all basic facilities. The place was built for 250 people but more than a thousand of us had been packed in like sheep. There was no drinking water or privacy for women prisoners. We had to sit on dharna to get just about anything—food, water or bedding.

Finally when the drinking water arrived, it did so in large barrels designed to carry garbage with 'Swaccha Chikmagaluru' labels pasted on them! The food was sufficient for only about three hundred people. We asked for beds and got thin carpets and thinner sheets instead.

But none of these difficulties hurt our confidence or lessened our zeal. On the contrary, the two days brought us closer together, inspired us to keep up the fight and nourished our spirits. When writers and activists K. Ramdas and Bhanu Mushtaq called anxiously, imagining that we faced hardship in jail, I assured them, "No, there are no problems. Actually, it has been such a good experience that I wish you too were here. I'm sure you would feel envious if I told you about our time here!"

The jail was indeed like a microcosm of Karnataka. It had young boys and girls, progressive thinkers, communists, Muslim community leaders, artists, journalists, teachers, women activists, farmers' leaders and politicians from across the state.

The funny part was that there were also a few who had come to take part in the Datta Jayanti organized by the Bajrang Dal. They had somehow got into our vehicle and were pushed into jail with us. But it looked like they were complete converts to the cause of social harmony after the two-day stay with us. All of us who spent time crammed in one place were really perfect strangers, and yet bound by a strong sense of unity. Nothing untoward happened at any time.

I was arrested on a Sunday and the *Patrike* had to go to print the same night. Even if I wrote my column in jail, it was impossible to fax it to Bengaluru. What was worse, our Hassan reporter, Chandrachud, who had come to help me was also in jail with me. So I had to dictate my column to the office on my cellphone.

Senior police officer Subhash Bharani came even as I was dictating the column on phone.

"Today is your deadline, right?" he asked. "We are planning to release everyone tonight. If you wish, you could leave right away."

"I need to be in touch with my office today. My phone's battery has run out of charge. It would be enough if the phone charger was brought from my hotel room," I said.

Although he agreed, it was not to happen. It was a case of the king's orders being undone by the palace guards. The police guards wouldn't allow for my charger to be brought to me. "You can leave, but you cannot come back," they said. Though the young activists of the Communal Harmony Forum and the All India Youth Federation asked me to leave, I did not want to be released unless everyone else was.

Finally Bharani, who got wind of this, arranged for my suitcase to be fetched from the hotel room. There were more than a hundred cell phones amongst us. Allowing them to be charged meant contact with the outside world. So the next day, the jail authorities cut off the power supply.

The people who stood with us all through were the Muslims of Chikmagalur. Bababudangiri, which represents the syncretic Sufi tradition, was not an important place of worship for most native Muslims of Chikmagalur town. So they had generally remained aloof from the controversy. But the recent developments in Chikmagalur, with the saffron brigade growing all-powerful, have made them realize that they would end up the victims if communal riots were to occur. This realization has made them proactive in protecting the harmony between communities in Chikmagalur.

The previous day, special prayers for the success of our rally had been offered at all the mosques of Chikmagalur. As soon as they heard that about a thousand had been arrested, the local Muslim leaders collected 40,000 rupees to arrange our food. They sent us bottled water and food whenever these fell short. They sent us sweaters, coffee, tea and—since it was biting cold—even cigarettes and beedis. A group of young

Muslim men was stationed outside the jail just in case we needed anything. We are eternally grateful to Yusuf Haji, who took over the leadership of all these activities.

Though we were in jail, we sang, danced and debated and didn't notice the two days pass. I couldn't read a single page of Gabriel García Márquez's just-released autobiography that I had brought along.

There were so many unforgettable moments in those two days—a loyal *Patrike* reader who wept on seeing me struggle to write the column; the naughty boy who screamed 'Lara Datta ek hai' when we shouted the slogan 'Baba Datta ek hai'; the Muslim youth who quietly entered my more spacious cell at the crack of dawn to offer their prayers even as I slept; the young man who impatiently said we should stop our old slogans on overcoming caste and creed since we had anyway achieved it after being crammed into the jail and instead coin new slogans demanding food; the students who fretted about their exams the next day…

The cool moonlight that spread across the jail courtyard at night and the groups of people who sat scattered in small clutches, warming themselves in front of bonfires… These scenes are unforgettable too.

My heart spills over with a new enthusiasm when I think of all those young boys and girls who spent time with us in jail. I feel a new spurt of life that drives me to go on. It was a place that forged new friendships, new affections. In a very real sense, it was an abode of harmony. It was not something I alone experienced. I have no doubt that hundreds of people who were together with me there felt just the same way.

24 December 2003, *Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Bageshree S.

An all-surpassing motherly love

Our country still has a future. There are people here who transcend the differences of caste and religion. I shall tell you a true story which illustrates that affection and humaneness are still valued. At the centre of this story is Vivek alias Muzaffar, an eight-year-old boy. The other protagonists are a Muslim couple, Salim and his wife Jabunnissa who gave birth to Muzaffar, and Veena Patni, a Hindu mother who has raised Vivek with love for the past six years.

Vivek alias Muzaffar's story begins six years ago. It was 28 February 2002. Fifty-nine people had been burned to death in Godhra the previous day, when many bogies of the Sabarmati Express went up in flames. As a reaction to that, Hindu nationalists had started attacking the Muslims of Gujarat.

That day, Salim had gone to Gulberg Society in Ahmedabad to visit his grandmother, taking along with him his two-year-old son Muzaffar. Just then, former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri's house had been attacked by a mob of Hindu nationalists. Jafri's body was chopped into pieces, and his house set on fire.

Salim fled to escape this inhuman mob. When he returned, he found the dead body of his grandmother, but there was no sign of his son Muzaffar.

That day—and in the two months following the carnage—almost three thousand Muslims lost their lives and more than four hundred people, including children like Muzaffar, went missing.

Salim and Jabunnisa searched for Muzaffar everywhere.

They filed a complaint with the police. They lived in the hope that their son was safe and that they would find him one day.

What they did not know was that a policeman called Praveen Patni had taken Muzaffar to his relatives, Vikram and Veena Patni. The Patni couple were neither childless nor wealthy. They had four grown-up children. Vikram worked for daily wages; Veena earned money by selling fish.

Two-year-old Muzaffar, who had no idea who he was and where he came from, was renamed Vivek once in the care of the Patni couple, and was nurtured with much love. Veena sang him lullabies, fed him with her hands, held his hand and walked him. She raised him like her own son.

On the other side, Salim and Jabunnisa continued their search for Muzaffar with the help of Teesta Setalvad. When they finally traced his whereabouts, they requested that he be returned to them. When Veena asked them to prove that he was indeed their son, Vivek alias Muzaffar underwent a DNA test. This proved that Vivek was indeed Salim and Jabunnisa's son.

But Veena, who had raised the boy for six years, did not agree to hand him over to his birth parents. Salim and Jabunnisa approached the courts. To their misfortune, he had not just forgotten his birth parents, but also told the judge that he wanted to be with his mother Veena. According to law, even though he rightfully belonged with those who had borne him, it was decided he would stay with Veena for the present, so that he would not be traumatized.

Salim and Jabunnisa understand Veena's love for their son. But they cannot forget and remain silent about having borne this child. Salim, who has now decided to appeal to the high court, says, "Veena can be his elder mother, my wife can be his younger mother. I will take care of her as my sister-in-law. But we want our son back."

In Bertolt Brecht's famous play *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the birth mother herself is ready to drag and pull her son, but the adoptive mother who raised him cannot bear to hurt him, and refuses to pull him towards her. But in The Judgment of Solomon episode that appears in *The Bible*, when King Solomon orders that the baby under dispute be chopped in two, to be shared by the two mothers, it is the birth mother who cries, "Don't kill my child. Give him to her."

This means it is not easy to decide which is greater—the birth mother's love or that of the foster mother. Vivek alias Muzaffar's case becomes important for one reason—in these times, when people are blinded by caste, religion and status, this little boy and his two mothers reflect the maternal love, affection and humanity that rises above them all.

May this incident help Gujarat, which has seen enough hatred and bloodshed in the name of religion, to find the humanity hidden within its heart.

10 August 2008, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Sushma Veerappa

Kalingaraya in Ajjampura

His name is Kalingaraya. On hearing Tippeswamy call out his name, Kalingaraya, who was somewhere among the two hundred and fifty members of his community, stepped forward and presented himself to us. But in a few moments, he started to run as if shy of being seen by us.

"He is so beautiful," I exclaimed, admiring his height, majestic shoulders, well-built body, the dignity of his bearing, and the rhythm in his run.

Kalingaraya is a bull of Ajjampura's Amrit Mahal kaval (grasslands).

The day before yesterday was the first time I saw Kalingaraya and the other bulls, cows and calves, and the kaval they inhabit. Venkatesh of Ajjampura, who is my adopted brother, had been insisting that I visit this kaval. He and a few of his friends have formed a committee and ensured that the Amrit Mahal kaval didn't pass into the hands of a fraud swami or some other trickster.

You might remember that my father, who had visited this cattle breeding centre in 1989, wrote an essay praising the Amrit Mahal cattle. In fact, Chandregowda has written about this several times and spoken about it too. All this had me wanting to visit the centre. By the way, consider the name given to this indigenous cattle species: Amrit Mahal. Isn't it so rich with meaning, and beautiful?

It is common knowledge that everyone from the Vijayanagar kings to Haider Ali, Tipu Sultan to the British, provided huge support to the protection and conservation of the Amrit Mahal breed. Along with money, thousands of acres of land were set aside for it. But, post-independence, especially since political leaders started obsessing over how to stint money, the breed was neglected. Apart from the centre at Ajjampura, there are about five to six districts in the state where the centres built especially for Amrit Mahal cattle are mired in problems. As a consequence, the cattle have grown weak and this marvelous breed is threatened with extinction.

The situation hadn't turned this bad until recently. Every time a new government is formed in the state, visiting an Amrit Mahal centre is among the first things done by the minister for animal husbandry. But look at the irony. Although it has been a full year since the BJP has been in power, proclaiming cow-protection as its priority, channeling crores of rupees from the state treasury to a dishonest swami who lies that he will protect the native breeds, the animal husbandry minister Revu Naik Belamagi hasn't yet visited Ajjampura.

Two days ago, the 'animal minister'—as informal usage has it—Belamagi, conducted a token meeting with the officers of Birur about the protection of the Amrit Mahal breed. When asked why the meeting had not been held at the Ajjampura centre, the officers replied that the building in Ajjampura was under repair. A saffron-clad swami from the Prani Daya Sangha (Compassion for Animals), a little-known body created by the RSS, was also invited to this meeting. When Venkatesh and his friends queried the presence of a swami in an officers' meeting, the swami fled in his car.

Yet, an even more shocking aspect of this whole affair is the decisions taken at the meeting by Belamagi and his 'animal officials'. Although the Ajjampura centre has played a central role in protecting the Amrit Mahal for centuries, it was decided to improve a centre in the neighboring district instead. Further, of the ten crore rupees allocated for the protection of the breed, none was apportioned towards a scheme for the betterment of the Ajjampura centre. The people there are enraged, convinced that the decisions are a disguised attempt at destroying their centre. Democratic activist groups in Chikmagalur and the locals in Ajjampur are now preparing to fight these decisions.

Ranganath, an officer at the Ajjampur centre, was also present when I visited. He explained the problems of his centre, which lacks even a decent fence, and the possible ways of addressing them. Ranganath appeared to have a genuine concern for the cows of Ajjampura. But how much can he do when the government lacks a clear plan, or didn't allocate enough funds, or didn't recruit the required staff and technical personnel, or didn't recover the encroached kaval lands?

One of the many problems faced by the Ajjampura centre pertains to the Bellary *jaligida*. These shrubby trees have surrounded the entire kaval and made grazing difficult for the cows. If merely removing them costs a crore, how much more might be needed to resolve the various difficulties facing all the kavals of the Amrit Mahal? The Government does not lack funds. If three hundred crore rupees could be set aside to construct roads for the convenience of the Reddy mining barons, and crores of rupees allocated to small-time swamis, the government can surely spare money for safeguarding the Amrit Mahal. But the government isn't concerned about saving this breed. Instead, it zealously allocates thousands of acres of land to some Sangh parivar swami in the name of cow-protection. This lets the government boast about its work towards protecting the cows, but in reality, it allows for an easy way of managing a real estate business worth crores.

If a few cows survive in the Amrit Mahal centre, it is due to the efforts of people like Tippeswamy. Tippeswamy, who has tended these cows for the last twenty years, has given a name to each one of them, and can recognize them from a distance. What's more, he can also identify the centres to which each cow belongs and the year of its birth.

The government ought to appoint such able workers and officers as Tippeswamy. Additionally, since the Amrit Mahal cows, like other animals, migrate from one centre to the other in search of food, the government needs to evolve an appropriate scheme for developing all the centres. It has to redevelop the Ajjampura centre which has been the core centre for a few hundred years.

None of this is wasteful expenditure. The sale of a pair of Amrit Mahal bulls fetches a lakh of rupees even now. If they are well tended, therefore, sufficient money to conserve the breed becomes available through their sale. The centres can become self-reliant within a few years.

Achieving such a success needs political will, and not pretend concern, or false slogans. If Belamagi and Yeddyurappa really care about protecting the marvelous Amrit Mahal breed, they have to show their political will immediately.

Otherwise, the people of Ajjampur will surely chase them and their saffron friends away… just as the saffron-clad swamiji who had accompanied Belamagi was chased away recently.

15 July 2009, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Sudhamshu Mitra

A.P. Shah: The people's judge

At a time when much rot and stink surrounds us, this story of an honest and pro-people judge might help keep alive what hope remains for the future of this country. After reading an article on him in *The Hindu* recently, I did some research and want to share it with you.

His name is Justice Ajit Prakash Shah. The chief justice of the Delhi High Court until recently, when he retired, it was not, as is customary, just the judges and lawyers who gathered to bid him farewell. Dozens of ordinary citizens, progressive thinkers and activists too joined them.

If you ask me what makes Justice Shah so special among the hundreds of judges in this country, I would say it is the spirit of his judgments.

Consider some of them. Recently, the Delhi government decided to drive beggars back to their native states as they were a blot on the city's beauty. Newspapers carried articles about this matter. A few citizens went to court questioning the inhuman decision. Justice Shah's judgement not only ruled against the Delhi Government, but also said that beggary is no crime and beggars are not criminals. He asked why beggars were being pushed out of a city where criminals seemed to live freely. Pushing beggars out of the city was a crime against humanity, he said.

Last month, hundreds of people in north India died from the bitter cold. The temperature had plummeted to four degrees celsius in Delhi. At such a time, the Delhi government destroyed a shelter for the poor on Pusa Road and left them homeless. The reason was simple: the Commonwealth Games were to be held in Delhi in another ten months and the 'great' nation would suffer an insult if foreign delegates saw the shelter for the poor. So JCB machines were summoned to raze it down and enhance the 'beauty' of the capital. This was the government's way of removing poverty.

Newspapers reported extensively on the poor being pushed out into the open in winter. When he learned of it, Justice Shah, without waiting for anyone to approach the court, issued an order asking the Delhi Municipal Corporation to immediately draw up plans to provide shelter for the victims.

Throughout his career, when public interest came in conflict with either the interests of capitalists or those of the state, Justice Shah stood firmly on the side of public interest. Deciding on a twelve-year-long legal battle between Apollo Hospital and a non-government organization, Justice Shah said that the right to health was a fundamental right and none could deny it. He ruled that one-third of the inpatient beds in Apollo Hospital and 40 per cent of the beds in the outpatient ward should be made available to the poor free of charge.

He had delivered such landmark judgments earlier as well, when he was a judge of the Bombay High Court. For example, he pulled up and fined the Shiv Sena and Bharatiya Janata Party for imposing a bandh on Mumbai and ruled that no political party had the right to do so under law. He found that their actions violated the constitutionally guaranteed rights of the citizens of Mumbai, and imposed a fine of Rs 20 lakh each on the two parties. What's more, he ordered that the amount be spent for public purposes in Mumbai.

In another instance, Justice Shah took exception to the Maharashtra government's ploy to suppress Doordarshan's telecast of a feature film about terrorism in Punjab and Anand Patwardhan's documentary on the Ayodhya issue, *Ram Ke Naam*. His order cleared the way for the films to be telecast.

Another judgment of Justice Shah opened up a new world for thirty innocent children. The Byculla prison in Mumbai had thirty small children staying with their mothers who were inmates. Most of them had never seen the world beyond prison. Following a public interest litigation, Justice Shah ordered that an anganwadi be opened for these children near the prison officials and workers' quarters. He ruled that furniture and playthings be provided by the prison authorities for the anganwadi, and teachers' salary expenses be met by the government. What a creative mind at work!

As the chief justice of Madras High Court for two years, he tried to improve the judicial infrastructure by setting up child care facilities in family courts, mediation centres in the districts and decentralized training programs for judges.

Over the last two years, as the chief justice of the Delhi High Court, Justice Shah gained wide popularity through a series of timely pro-people judgments that helped the poor and the downtrodden.

But the most widely debated among all his judgments was the historic one that decriminalized homosexuality by reading down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The division bench of which he was part said that this 150-year-old legal impediment to the practice of homosexuality was discriminatory and violated the fundamental rights of the citizens. Through this landmark judgment, Justice Shah affirmed that sexuality was a matter of individual freedom and upheld the fundamental values of democracy.

One more thing needs to be noted about Justice Shah. He never made it to the Supreme Court, though he was qualified in every way and known throughout his career as a man who cared for social justice. On this, he said on his last working day, "I cannot pretend that I am not hurt. But my disappointment never diminished my commitment to justice."

Isn't it a tragedy that a judge who strove to deliver justice all his life had to suffer such injustice?

3 March 2010, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Bageshree S.

The autobiography of my sister Revathi

Her name is Revathi. The first time I met fair, beautiful Revathi five or six years ago, she was draped impeccably in a light yellow sari with a green border. Her hair was neatly combed and tied in a knot. With kumkuma on her forehead, ear studs, chain and bangles, she looked like a regular, middle-class housewife. Revathi had fallen in love with a colleague at work and married him. I had known her husband from several years earlier. For some reason, differences cropped up between husband and wife, and he decided to leave her and go his own way.

Revathi asked me for help. "Please do something and persuade him not to leave me." I do not like interfering in the marital lives of others. Besides, since he had already made up his mind, I knew it would solve no problems were Revathi to force him to stay with her. "How can I help you, Revathi? That's between you and him," I had said, expressing my helplessness.

They were not an ordinary couple. Revathi is a hijra. He is bisexual. Whatever the case, they separated in the end. But both remain my friends to this day.

Last year, Penguin published Revathi's autobiography in English. I wished to publish it in Kannada, but Revathi had already found another publisher for the Kannada edition. "Akka, why didn't you tell me earlier? I have agreed to publish it with someone else. What shall I do now?" She asked sadly. "It's okay; leave it. It's enough if your story gets published in as many languages as possible, and many people learn about the difficulties in a hijra's life," I said.

For some reason, the Kannada publisher who had shown an interest in her autobiography was not able to publish it. Revathi, who was then living in Tamil Nadu, called me and asked, "Akka, can you publish it?" I happily agreed. Two weeks later, Revathi came to my office with a poet and dear friend of hers, Du. Saraswathi. We decided that Saraswathi would translate the autobiography. We fixed a deadline too.

Saraswathi did a fine job of the translation. She had read out the entire draft to Revathi, before sending it to me two days ago.

I have already finished reading three-fourths of the book. I have shed tears, felt sad, laughed, and sighed many times while reading it. Really, Revathi's description of her hard life is wonderful and moving. All those who read the autobiography will surely empathize with the lives of hijras.

Revathi was born Doraiswamy into an ordinary family in a small village in Salem district of Tamil Nadu. She is a rare being. She was determined to protect her sense of identity amidst all her pain. She desired to live a life of self-respect in the face of difficulties. She kept alive a love for her parents and brothers even when they humiliated her. She was magnanimous in finding happiness in small things under conditions of harsh poverty.

Life is said to be a struggle. But Revathi's life was like a continuous battle.

Even as a little child, Revathi becomes aware that she is a woman in a man's body. From then on, her life's journey changes. She eventually runs away from home to live with other hijras like her, who might understand her. She is only sixteen or seventeen years old. She has no money, can speak only Tamil, and yet manages to visit her guru in far-off Delhi. There, she joins other hijras and starts a life of begging.

Learning of her whereabouts, her family plots to make her return. They proceed to thrash her black and blue, and cut her long hair in an attempt to 'correct' her.

Revathi again escapes, to Mumbai this time. She undergoes a sex change operation there with her guru's financial support. She then becomes a sex worker, to live out her desires. A strong need to see her family starts tugging at her. "Now that I have become a woman, my brothers cannot do anything," she feels, and returns home. But again, what confronts her there is the same humiliation, harassment and neglect. Unable to bear the torture, she leaves home again. This time, she comes to Bangalore. She joins a *hamam*—a bath house—and tries to live here.

By then, Sangama, an organization for sexual minorities had already started in Bengaluru. Revathi joined this organization and involved herself in the fight for the rights of hijras and other sexual minorities. I met her when I participated in one of their protests.

Revathi called me the other day. "Akka, when will my book be ready? Who do you think we should invite for the release?" she asked.

"I am still looking at the proofs. The layout has to be completed, and then proofs re-checked, Revathi," I replied. "Anyway, let that be... who would you like to invite for the release?"

"Akka, it shouldn't become a gathering of only hijras. My life has much in common with other oppressed people. It would be good if they were part of the release event," she said.

"What you say is right. Let's think about it," I said.

Before she hung up, Revathi asked, "You don't mind me calling you Akka, do you?"

"Why would I mind?" I said. "I like it when you call me Akka."

We will soon release my younger sister's book *The Truth About Me: The Autobiography of a Hijra*, as *Baduku Bayalu* in Kannada. It is truly a moving life story.

13 April 2011, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Sushma Veerappa

The state's apathy in Savanur

Today is Deepavali. The people of Bengaluru are bursting crackers to celebrate a festival that is a symbol of hope and contentment. However, on my mind are forty people in a faraway town who are leading hellish lives, without hope or contentment.

My young friend, the poet Veeranna Madiwala, visited our office recently. Our conversation turned to the people of the manual scavenger community of Savanur town in North Karnataka. On November 20 last year [2010] three people of that community—known as bhangi—protested in front of the town's municipality office by pouring excreta over themselves. They were hoping through this protest to save the ramshackle roofs over their heads that the local administration threatened to take away.

This protest shook the whole country. The state government quickly promised to resolve the issue. The legislator from the region and irrigation minister Basavaraj Bommai shed tears and promised to do all he could for the community and give them a new life.

But what has happened to these bhangis since then? What has the government done for them?

I got the telephone number of a leader of the bhangi community, Manjunath Bhangi, from Veeranna and spoke to him. I am sharing here what he told me.

Before that some background. Before independence, Savanur was part of the kingdom of Nawab Majid Khan. The nawab granted the members of the bhangi community three guntas of land to build houses for themselves. It was an oral decree without accompanying documents. Some of them duly built their houses and started living there. The country got independence in 1947, but little changed for the bhangis. They remained manual scavengers from the time of the nawab to the time of Bommai.

The Karnataka government's submission to the Supreme Court that the practice of manually cleaning sewers has been stopped is an absolute lie. Manual scavenging continues to be practised in various parts of the state to this day. The death of three dalits in Kolar on 24 October 2011, while cleaning the sewers, is testimony to this. Since several places like Savanur in Haveri district do not have an underground drainage system, the work of cleaning the sewers falls on the bhangis.

As time went by, the Kamal Bangadi area where fourteen families of bhangis lived ended up becoming the central part of the town, with high real estate value. Naturally the local administration started eyeing this piece of land. After all, it was still listed as 'vacant' in their book. Many corrupt politicians and bureaucrats were keen to appropriate it. The town municipality resolved to build a commercial complex in the place occupied by the bhangis. Let alone consult the community, the administration went out of its way to ensure that they did not even hear about these plans. As per the law, anyone living continuously in one place for over thirty years acquires certain rights over it and nothing can be done with that place without consulting them. The administration did not do any of this. If they had admitted that the bhangis had been living there for thirty years, they would have had to pay compensation and make plans for their relocation.

What followed were several ploys to evict the bhangis.

The women of the community were threatened, stones pelted at their houses and garbage dumped in their front yards. When they did not yield, the water supply to their homes was cut off.

This was when the community realized how deadly serious the town municipality was about evicting them. Moreover, their deity, Dyamoha, is installed in this area and a *jatra* (fair) is conducted every three years in which all the members of the community from Haveri district participate. They feared losing both their home and their god. They petitioned the district authorities not to evict them, but no one listened. They asked the tahsildar, assistant commissioner and the district commissioners to give them title deeds and restore their drinking water supply since they, being bhangis, are not allowed to access the shared public tap.

They did not get so much as a response to any of these petitions. A desperate community then decided to protest by dousing themselves with excreta. This is the background to the story.

What happened after the shocking protest? As everyone knows, Basavaraj Bommai wept publicly over their pathetic condition and called an emergency meeting of the district officials. It was decided that the bhangis would not be evicted, but houses would be built for thirteen families at a cost of Rs 1.6 lakh each with all facilities provided. It was also decided that nine of them would be provided jobs and their children a student stipend.

But to this day, the bhangis have neither proper homes nor permanent jobs. Nine houses were built about three kilometres away from the town. Though 1.6 lakh was sanctioned for each, half the sum got pocketed by those in charge of executing the work. It follows that corners were cut in the quality of construction. For instance, two-and-half-inch slabs were used instead of six-inch ones for the ceilings. The construction was so poor that cracks had appeared in the walls and the ceiling was leaking even before the recipients could occupy the building.

The bhangis are shrinking in size. As per the records there were seventeen families of the community in Savanur in 2001. That reduced to eleven in 2011. The principal reason for this is the occupation of bhangis. They work amidst such filth all the time that most die of diseases. To this day, you cannot find people of this community in Savanur who are over forty years old.

Although fourteen families were affected, the government has built only nine houses. These houses have no toilets or a power connection. They have collected 1.2 lakh rupees from the families to provide a power connection but are delaying it saying that the tendering process takes time. It has been five long months.

Similar disappointment awaited them on the promised jobs. Bommai had promised permanent jobs to nine of them. Law minister Suresh Kumar too had ordered that all formalities be completed by 10 May and the jobs given. The nine hirings that ensued are on contract, for without them Savanur would stink. Although their salary on paper is 4,820 rupees, they get only about 3,000 rupees. "That too we are not paid regularly. They pay us once in three or four months," says Manjunath Bhangi.

I was surprised to hear that twelve of them had been interviewed in the process of being made permanent employees. "What was that interview about? Did they test you on how well you clean?" I asked. "No, it was a drama just to make the point that we cannot be made permanent employees as per the rules," he said. As if to confirm this, the officers are now saying that giving all of them permanent jobs is difficult. Even their demand that eight of them be given jobs is not being met, postponed with excuses like the tahsildar being absent on one day and the case worker on another.

Amidst all this, there was even some black comedy. As Manjunath explained, after they staged their protest, the Ambedkar Development Corporation gave them a few cows and sheep on a 35,000-rupee loan. "We said we didn't want them since we cannot afford to feed and look after them. The members of the corporation then told us that we needn't repay the loan and so we finally agreed. Half of the cows and sheep they gave us were sick and lame. Many of them died within days. We have asked others to look after the remaining animals. Now the corporation is asking us to repay the loan! From where do we get the money?"

The whole controversy began with the local administration's conspiracy to raze their houses at Kamal Bangadi to make way for a commercial complex. The officials are saying that they should move to the new houses built for them and the houses at Kamal Bangadi cannot be returned. It means that the officials and leaders have not given up their plans of snatching away land worth eighty lakhs from them.

But the bhangis are not ready for this. So Manjunath Bhangi, his mother and some relatives continue to live in their old houses. While they now get water there, there is neither power nor any other facility. "I don't know when the old structure will fall on our heads, but it is our place. We have our house here, and more importantly, our god is here. Whatever happens, we will not move from here," says Manjunath Bhangi.

What does all this tell us? There is no difference in the lives of the bhangis one-and-a-half years after they protested in a dramatic fashion. This is yet another example of the cruelty, hypocrisy and inefficiency of the BJP government. Manjunath Bhangi succinctly sums up the present situation. "Basavaraj Bommai that day promised us a new life. Today his mobile phone is switched off."

9 November 2011, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Bageshree S.

The compassion of Dayamani Barla

BJP chief minister Jagadish Shettar has recently transferred about 2,600 acres of land in Kuditini, Bellary, to the world's top steel company, ArcelorMittal. It means that a steel giant has entered Karnataka and taken the first step towards looting its natural resources. It will be no surprise if other steel companies like POSCO soon follow. Such companies, with the support of corrupt governments, offer paltry compensation to farmers and take away lands which are their only means of livelihood. Not only that, they evict people, dig out ore and destroy the environment. As the local people grow impoverished, company profits keep multiplying. This has been seen to happen over and again across the world.

How do we put an end to frauds perpetrated jointly by corrupt governments and exploitative companies? How do we expose such anti-national activities? Can we stop this business of rendering people bankrupt on their own land while offering a red carpet welcome to such companies? Questions like these should have no place in a real democracy. But they are important in a country like ours with its hypocritical democracy.

Indians today find themselves in such a difficult situation that they are unable to figure out how to resist and throw a government out of power even when they know that the government is framing policies and rules that blatantly violate the interests of the people. In recent times, there have been countless examples in our country of individuals facing the wrath of governments for siding with the people. Starting with Binayak Sen, who was illegally sent to jail, to Teesta Setalvad, who is facing hundreds of false cases on account of her judicial battle against Narendra Modi, the number of such activists is large. It has been thirteen years since Irom Sharmila started her fast. One more name that has recently joined this list is that of Dayamani Barla, a tribal woman. She has been sent to jail for raising her voice for the rights of tribal people.

Dayamani was born to a poor tribal family in Jharkhand. Her father, who was not clever with finances, lost his small piece of land to moneylenders. He then found a job in a nearby town while her mother became a housemaid in another town. Dayamani, who wanted to study, continued till class seven in her village even as she worked in other people's fields. She too moved to Ranchi later and joined a high school, doing this while working in someone's house there, eating leftovers and sleeping in their cow shed. She did not stop at that but finished her graduation too, funding her education with money earned through typing.

By then protests against the Koel-Karo hydro-electric project had gained momentum. The project was to result in the inundation of about 66,000 acres of land, which included rich natural resources and forests, besides rendering 1,35,000 tribals homeless. Dayamani who actively participated in these protests realized that if her people were to be protected, their forests, lands and rivers had to be protected too. She also saw that mainstream media did not report on the problems and protests of the tribal people. To project and protect the voice of the tribal people, she borrowed Rs 25,000 from a bank and started a newspaper called *Jan Haq* (People's Rights). Though it did not last long, it drew people's attention to Dayamani's concern and her straightforward and evocative style of writing. A prominent Hindi magazine called *Prabhat Khabar* offered her a column. At the same time, Dayamani started an organization called Adivasi Moolavasi Astitwa Rakshan Samiti [Forum for the Protection of the Rights of Indigenous People] and continued to be active in public life. The committed woman Dayamani was, she opened a tea shop in order to be constantly in touch with the people. It not only provided her a means of livelihood but also a way of constantly being in touch with her people who would get together at this place and share the ups and downs of their lives.

The government finally gave up the Koel-Karo project because people's protests had gone through the roof. For the tribal people, that was not to be the end of their troubles. Within a few years a new prospector called Lakshmi Mittal turned up there. He appealed to the Jharkhand Government to grant 12,000 acres of land to his company ArcelorMittal to start a steel unit there. The government readied itself to offer the land, as if it felt fortunate he had asked. Not just that. Preparations began to raze to the ground forty-five villages and evict about 70,000 tribals from there. The woman who stood firmly with the tribals then was Dayamani. "The way of life we have built on this land is more precious to us than the small change compensation you pay. We won't give you an inch of land," she said, and started an agitation. There was such immense support for her agitation that, to this day, Mittal's company has not got a single acre of land.

More recently, Dayamani started another agitation. The government had given away 227 acres of fertile land in a village called Nagari just a few kilometers from the Jharkhand capital Ranchi, to start an IIT and a national law school. This would destitute about 500 tribal families who had depended on agriculture for generations. Dayamani started a peaceful agitation with all of them. People did not lose their patience when the police destroyed all their standing crop. They did not show any anger when the government pitted three out of the four units of its reserve police force against the people of Nagari. They did not lose their calm when false cases were booked against the people of the village. At the same time, none of this stopped them from posing the question: What is the propriety in building luxury education institutions like IIT and national law school on land snatched from the tribals when the tribal people who are a majority in the state do not even have access to basic facilities or primary education? This naturally left the government squirming.

Dayamani, who never compromised with political parties or leaders and worked untiringly and selflessly, was so popular that she was a headache for the government as well as the corporate houses. That was why the government was waiting for an opportunity to pin her down.

You would hardly believe what came in handy for them to do so. Six years ago Dayamani was part of a protest against fraud in the government's ambitious job guarantee scheme. They demanded that job cards be given only to the eligible people. She had then been booked for obstructing a government employee from performing his duties. Now the government has resurrected this case and arrested her. The logic is that the tribal people would have risen up in rebellion if she had been arrested in connection with the protests for their land rights. So it makes sense to make an excuse of the job cards.

The Dayamani who could stop villains like Mittal in their tracks continues to be kept in jail even though she has got bail. Activists from across India have raised their voices demanding her release. But both the state and the centre have been totally indifferent to them.

At the same time the BJP government here in Karnataka has given land to Mittal's company and rolled out the red carpet for him. As I said earlier it is only a small step towards imminent loot.

I hope courageous activists like Dayamani Barla emerge in our state to stop this.

21 November 2012, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*
Translated by Bageshree S.

All fundamentalisms are wrong

Salman Rushdie's proposed visit to the Jaipur Literature Festival, the objections raised to it by some fundamentalist Deoband Muslims, Rushdie's insistence that he would participate nevertheless, the talk of supari killers out to kill him, and finally, Rushdie's decision to stay out of the festival... These are not limited to questions of a writer's freedom of expression and his social responsibility. Embedded in them are several other questions and it is important that we pay attention to them.

Rushdie is a great writer and one who revels in controversy. The fatwa issued to kill him after the publication of his novel, *The Satanic Verses*, on the grounds that it insults Muslims, preceded by our government's decision to ban the book, were both outrageous.

What is the difference between some mullahs asking for Rushdie's head in accusing him of insulting Islam, and Kalladka Prabhakar Bhat of the RSS [a leader in the coastal Karnataka region of Dakshina Kannada] saying that Muslim boys deserve to be killed because some of them flirted with Hindu girls on the streets? If one is condemnable, isn't the other equally so?

Similarly it is not right on the part of any government to ban any book. Generation after generation, new ideas have been expressed through new books that have contributed to the transformation of society. Some books have also led to the perversion of minds. But all healthy societies have picked those that are good for their well-being and discarded the others.

Today, a few might find Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* or

Bhyrappa's *Aavarana*[1] unsuitable, but that does not mean they should be banned. Instead there should be open discussions and exchange of ideas on such books. If books were to be banned for the reason that some people do not like them, there would be no books and literature left in the world today.

For instance, what the vachanakaras said in twelfth-century Karnataka must certainly have seemed dangerous to many. What would have happened if there was a diktat to kill all vachanakaras and ban their vachanas? Similarly, what would have happened if the works and thoughts of Charvaka, Periyar and Ambedkar had been banned?

Multiple streams of thought have flowed at all times and in all societies. If they have sometimes led to religious and social reforms, they led to the emergence of new branches at others.

For instance, there have been multiple forms of resistance to the Roman Catholic Church down the centuries, leading to the emergence of as many kinds of Christianity. Similarly, in Islam, besides the two powerful factions of Shia and Sunni, there are many Sufi traditions in several parts of the world including in India. Besides, there is the Ahmadiya sect that emerged in nineteenth-century India that has thousands of followers. While mainstream Islam recognizes Mohammed as the only true prophet, the Ahmadiyas extend the line of prophets further. They believe their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad [1835–1908], also received revelations from God. Then, there is the Yazidi sect which rejects the Hadith and believes in only the Quran, which took birth in Kurdistan in the last century… They all have Islam at their point of origin.

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[1] Published in 2007, S.L. Bhyrappa's novel *Aavarana* (2007) became an instant bestseller. A winner of the Sahitya Akademi award, *Aavarana*, Bhyrappa's twentieth novel, offers a brazenly revisionist far-right version of history where Muslims are seen to have had a destructive influence on Hindu society. It was published in English in 2017 as *Aavarana: The Veil*.

In a democratic society there are always new ideas and criticisms. It does great good to religion, its followers and society at large if such criticisms are not treated as insults but instead lead to introspection. If we insist that what we say alone is right and our stand the most correct, a religion, its followers and society become stagnant, gather moss and begin to stink.

This is not applicable only to those who are sharpening their knives against Rushdie and his book. It also applies to the Sambhaji Brigade that in 2004 opposed James Laine's book on Shivaji and ransacked the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute that had helped in his research, and to Hindutva groups that opposed A.K. Ramanujan's "Three hundred Ramayanas" and ensured its removal from the Delhi University syllabus.

It must be noted that none of the followers of Islam abandoned their faith on account of Rushdie's book, nobody's respect for Shivaji diminished because of Laine's book and Ramanujan's essay took people closer to the text rather than away from it.

Most importantly, fundamentalism has not done any good to any community or society at any time. That is what makes it most condemnable. In the context of India, fundamentalism in the minority communities has often boomeranged and proved dangerous to them. Equally importantly, it has directly and indirectly augmented fundamentalism in the majority community. This can bring nothing but destruction to both majority and minority communities.

The issue is not just about Rushdie and the Jaipur Literature Festival or even freedom of expression. It is about what does good or evil bring to our entire society.

8 February 2012, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Bageshree S.

Kannada: A tale of desertion and return

When I was a child, my parents enrolled me in The Home School in Basavangudi, where the instruction was in English. Everyone had to speak it in this school. The teachers scolded anyone who spoke in Kannada. The idea was to make us feel comfortable in English.

My classmates were from well-to-do families. While they arrived at school in cars, my father would take me there on a rented bicycle. Later, I used to go home in a jataka gaadi (a covered tonga). It was necessary for me to speak English as fluently as my classmates to prove I was equal to them.

An aged old-timer was our Kannada teacher. Dressed in a black coat and white panche, with a black cap on his head, and a long caste mark on his forehead, he was a Kannada teacher only in name. He hardly taught us a thing, and preferred to narrate stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. As a result, my hold on the language became weaker and weaker.

A shock awaited me when I moved to Vijaya High School. The English teacher was impressed with whatever I knew of the language, but to my Kannada teacher, I appeared a weird creature because I was clueless about Kannada grammar. I passed my exams somehow due to the interest the teacher had taken in me.

Biology, physics, mathematics and chemistry took priority at my Pre-University College. Kannada then slipped further away from me. By this time, reading in Kannada had become difficult. But there was no getting away from the exam. I found a way out: I asked my mother to read the Kannada texts aloud while I listened. I was then able to clear the exam.

The situation worsened during my BA. In the end, it came down to the same strategy: Amma read out the texts; and listening to her was my exam preparation. Scoring 35 out of 100 marks, I just about passed in the first year. But the following year my laziness did me in. It was easy enough to listen to my mother's reading, but putting it all down in words was a struggle. Even when I knew which words to use, the spelling went for a toss. And about my handwriting, the less said the better.

I failed the Kannada exam in the second year.

By then, Appa had not only become a major literary figure, the weekly he had founded circulated widely across the state. But his eldest child had flunked the Kannada exam. I hid this fact from him. I was sure of clearing the 'supplementary exam'.

I still hadn't realized my mistake. I continued not to read the prescribed Kannada texts. I failed the supplementary exam too. Let alone being able to write, even reading in Kannada was proving tough by then.

Kannada wasn't among my subjects in the final year of my BA. But I wouldn't get my BA degree if I didn't clear the failed paper from the previous year. That wouldn't let me study further or find a job. I realized that it would be a humiliation in front of everyone. I somehow worked hard and took the exam. I'm still not sure whether the fact that it was my third attempt helped me pass or some blessed soul saw my paper and passed me saying, 'Go, get lost!' Because, even this time, I had passed with 35 marks.

On clearing the exam, I let out a sigh of relief and decided never to go anywhere near Kannada.

In any case, I had found a job in the English media that let me earn a living. Oddly, they had recruited me presuming that Lankesh's daughter would surely know good Kannada and could cover press meets that took place in Kannada and look after Kannada press releases. They didn't know that I couldn't read Kannada properly. I took the help of my friend, Bharathi Gowda, who worked in the same office, to understand the press releases in Kannada and finish my work. In such a situation, can blunders be far away?

One day, a press note written in Kannada arrived in the office. Someone called Kota Shivarama Karanth had issued it. I knew of Shivarama Karanth—do I need mention that I hadn't read anything by him?—but hadn't heard of a Kota Shivarama Karanth. Bharathi, who could have helped me here, wasn't in office that day. Thinking he was a 'kota' (fake), I tossed the press note in the bin. The following day was tense. The other newspapers featured the press note prominently, and it had gone missing in ours. Mercifully, since our newspaper was still new to the city, the chief reporter assumed that Karanth had not sent it to us. I was saved.

On a different occasion, a complete ignoramus like me was sent to cover the World Kannada Conference in Mysore. At that event, the words spoken by the literary figures, thinkers and others simply flew over my head.

My later travels in Delhi, America and Europe further removed me from Kannada. Besides what we spoke at home, and reading through Appa's editorials and an occasional book, it didn't have any prominence in my life. There was no question of writing in the language. My letters to my parents were always in English.

But I am stubborn, quarrelsome. After resolving to write in Kannada, I quarreled deeply with the English inside me and made Kannada mine.

There are several problems in my Kannada even now. While speaking or writing, 'la' gets swapped with 'ḷa' and 'na' with 'ṇa'. The boys in the office rectify such slips. Similarly, lacking a rich Kannada vocabulary is a major weakness. I still ask around for the meaning of so many words. I have felt this to be a part of my continuing learning process. Since I write on my computer, bad handwriting has ceased being a problem. And, I get the spelling wrong on occasion. I keep hoping that some blessed soul will devise a spellcheck software for Kannada too.

Amidst all this, Kannada has become so deeply woven into my life that I scramble to find the English words that came so easily to me in the past. My ability to write and speak in Kannada has evolved to some extent. More than anything else, I now think and feel in Kannada.

On the occasion of Kannada Rajyotsava, I have addressed the same topic that we had offered our readers and shared how the Kannada that deserted me in the past has now returned to me.

20 November 2013, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Chandan Gowda

Tughlaq Modi

Narendra Modi has revealed his Tughlaq colours. Claiming to wage war against black money, he has instead gone to war against the middle class and the poor instead, who constitute the majority. By demonetizing Rs 1000 and Rs 500 notes, he has mocked them as cheats, and treated as thugs those without a morsel to eat.

Bizarre stories made the rounds on social media last week. Some claimed the new Rs 2000 note would have a nano chip to enable the government to monitor how the money was being spent. The income tax authorities, or so the stories said, would use satellites to locate and raid those hoarding new notes. The stories claimed the notes could be tracked even if they were buried 120 metres in the earth. Zee News in Hindi and a Kannada channel zealously put out imaginary stories. One of the anchors was bouncing up and down in delight like the pontiff of the Pejawar matha. The woman presenter who endorses Modi went to the extent of proclaiming the note featured a picture of the Mars mission to indicate how satellites would keep an eye on the currency.

The stories spread like wildfire. Last week, when I boarded the train to Hubballi, all my fellow passengers were talking about the chip. Taken aback at their naïveté, I said, "It's all a lie. There's no such chip in the note." Two middle-aged men, skeptical about me, said the news had appeared on TV. "Not everything that appears on TV is true," I said. They countered me: they had heard such notes were in circulation in America. "Who told you? There are no such notes anywhere in the world," I said. "What is the use of demonetization then?" one of them asked. "Think about it," I said. A young man on a top berth butted in: "You know what use it is? Big industrialists have borrowed from the banks and are not paying back their loans. The banks have no money. They are out to make people deposit their money. And people are taking old notes to the banks, fearing they will lose their worth otherwise."

"You mean this won't solve the black money problem?" one of the men wondered. "It will take care of fake currency for a while. But its proportion isn't big. Within months, there will be counterfeits of the new notes. The corrupt keep their wealth in the form of jewelry and property, not in cash. Only a small amount gets demonetized. In any case, we won't get, as Modi had promised, Rs 15 lakh each in our bank accounts," I said. "Oh, we thought Modi was on to something big. Looks like he has just put his hands into our pockets," one of the two men said, sighing.

Today, the State Bank of India has written off loans it had given to sixty-three companies. Know how much they owed? A whopping Rs 7,016 crore. This includes the Rs 1,201 crore owed by liquor baron Vijay Mallya. It isn't difficult to guess on whose side Modi stands: the affluent who borrowed to suit their fancies and whose loans the banks have waived, or the millions of hard-working people standing in long queues to deposit in banks the money they have earned.

Modi has not been able to bring back the black money stashed away abroad. He hasn't even been able to name the secret account holders. His election promise of delivering Rs 15 lakh into each citizen's account remains a pipe dream. Even if we put up with such scams, how can we look on as he snatches away the livelihoods of the poor and the middle class?

An elderly man waiting in line to take out money for his daily expenses has died. And how did a BJP vice-president respond to it? "Big deal. People die even in ration shop queues."

When it dawned on Modi that a majority was frustrated with his insane actions, he didn't say, "Please bear with me. I will fix the problem in a few days." Instead, he said, "I'm doing all this for the nation. People who have ruled us for seventy years are conspiring against me." No one in his party told him, "But sir, when did these people, struggling to withdraw their own money, ever rule in these seventy years? How can they conspire against you?"

People in the media and the middle class, who had hailed demonetization as Modi's 'masterstroke,' now see the machinations behind it. They are now aware the new note holds no magic. It can't banish black money, and Modi's erratic ways are causing them to suffer.

Modi continues to say we must put up with it all in the interest of the nation, but this problem won't go away soon. Common people will have to scrape and scrounge for cash at least for four months. Business has been affected badly. With no customers, fisherfolk and traders in West Bengal are in the doldrums. In Punjab, farmers have no cash to buy seeds. If they don't sow now, the prices of rice and wheat will go up soon. 'No money in hand, nothing to eat either' is the fate of millions.

The BJP is feeling the heat of the people's anger. Party president Amit Shah has instructed MPs to put up flex boards praising Modi's 'surgical strike' against black money. They usually follow his instructions to the letter, but this time they aren't heeding him. Except for an MP in Gujarat, no one has put up laudatory flex hoardings.

Even people in Gujarat have turned against Modi. Assembly elections are in progress. Party workers holding pamphlets went towards people standing in a bank queue. They were expecting praise from citizens. But they received blows instead!

Allies such as the Akali Dal in Punjab and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra are also turning their back on the BJP. Quite a few BJP leaders are openly criticizing Modi's actions in the presence of the media, though they are not willing to have their quotes attributed. Even Modi is coming to know the attrition he has generated. That is why he comes across as so fidgety on his tours.

About twenty-five people have died across the country on account of demonetization. In Uttar Pradesh, a couple with old notes was turned away from a hospital. Their daughter died as a consequence. A woman in Gujarat with old notes couldn't feed her two children; she hanged herself.

In Kanpur, a young man was trying for months to sell his property. On November 8, he finally received Rs 70 lakh as an advance. When he heard of demonetization the next morning, he suffered a heart attack and died. A woman in Telangana, who had sold her land for her husband's medical treatment and her daughter's wedding, was told the cash was worthless. She committed suicide. In Udupi, a man standing in a long queue for the bank to open died of a heart attack.

Not one of these was a thug or a black marketeer. Not one of them was an Adani, Ambani, Tata or Birla. They were honest middle-class people, farmers, homemakers, all earning their livelihood from honest toil. They ended up victims of Modi's grandiose war against black money. He is responsible for their deaths.

In fact, Modi has launched no surgical strike against black money. What he has done is push helpless people to death. What better can we expect from Modi's Tughlaq durbar?

30 November 2016, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*
Translated by S.R. Ramakrishna

2005–2015: A ten-year journey

It has been ten years! It feels as though it was only yesterday Appa's *Patrike* got resurrected in this new form.

When the weekly was reborn, my niece Esha was a seven-month-old baby. Now she is almost as tall as I. Dharam Singh was the chief minister at that time. Karnataka has seen four chief ministers since. The people of the state saw the BJP–JDS coalition, the terrible days of BJP rule and have now brought the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government to power.

The naxal movement too, which was in a sense responsible for the birth of this weekly, has transformed much since. Though appearances might suggest that the encounter killing of naxal leader Saketh Rajan and the subsequent massacre of the police at Pavagada by naxals [on 11 February 2005] impelled this weekly to forge a new identity, other reasons, other efforts to destabilize us, had played a part.

All that is of little consequence today. But what is the situation right now? The one-time naxal leaders Sirimane Nagaraj and Noor Sridhar have now joined mainstream democratic struggles, while the naxal leaders of other factions are either in prison or, as they announced recently, have left Malnad and moved away to the Karnataka–Kerala–Tamil Nadu tri-junction region to continue their underground activity.

Born a year before this weekly, the Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum (KCHF), turned ten last year and now finds itself stronger.

In the same period, we have lost many of our friends and well-wishers. K.P. Purnachandra Tejasvi, K. Ramdas, U.R.

Ananthamurthy, and my young friend Yuvraj, have passed away. Some old friends have walked away and some new ones have joined our team. Though we have suffered many setbacks, we have tried our hand at new ventures and won. Meanwhile, I have turned fifty-three and been promoted from the position of 'Akka' to 'Amma'!

In the era of intense competition, it is a challenge to run a pro-people's weekly without advertising support and without recourse to corrupt practices. We had to face a deep financial crisis within months of starting this weekly. There was only one way: to take on new tasks and build lifeboats to keep the weekly afloat.

What saved the life of *Patrike* when it was in the ICU, financially speaking, was *Guide*, a monthly magazine that the Lankesh team started. This magazine too will be ten soon. Our friend Parvathish who came up with this idea to save *Patrike* and worked hard for it is unfortunately not on our team any more.

It was the slew of publications from Lankesh Prakashana that helped *Patrike* recuperate fast and move from the ICU to the General Ward. Guide Prakashana and *Job News*, a new fortnightly that we began, nursed *Patrike* back to good financial health. *Job News* will soon be five.

So the last ten years have seen 520 issues of *Patrike*, 120 issues of *Guide*, 100 issues of *Job News*, 95 books from Lankesh Prakashana and over 50 books from Guide Prakashana.

Thousands of pages and lakhs of words... Our team has struggled day and night without a break to make the weekly work. Besides, there have been innumerable travels as part of KCHF and in the work of bringing naxals into the mainstream, cases filed against me in court, protests to go to, seminars to attend... In the midst of these there have been books to read, articles to write, the internet to surf, reporters to chase after to file copies on time, copies to edit and proofread…

The members of our team are at once activists and journalists. While activism gives our journalism a heart and a perspective, journalism gives our activism a comprehensive understanding of and a sensitivity to context. It is perhaps not possible, in today's world, for a journalist to be pro-people if he is not an activist in his or her own way.

In the middle of it all, if there is a moment's respite, I find solace in Amma's affection, bliss in Esha's embrace, warmth in my sister's love, fun in the company of my nephews, Samar and Samay, rejuvenation in gossip and argument with friends, entertainment in pulling the leg of *cheddis* on Facebook, relaxation in a game of cards on the internet… and finally peace in returning to my very quiet home at night for a few moments of dhyana in solitude.

What is all this in aid of? All the hard work and facing challenges? Why am I punishing my body? Why am I still struggling to fully repay the lakhs of rupees of loan incurred over the years? Even as I cry after bitter fights with friends or my body buckles from the strain of coping with it all, why do I struggle to make sure the weekly comes out every week and reaches your hands on time?

It will be pompous to say that the weekly is indispensable for the people of this land. It would be more appropriate to say that we have struggled to show honest concern for our people to the best of our ability.

Appa is the cornerstone of this weekly. It has stood on the philosophical foundation he laid. Communal harmony and peace should prevail in our land; casteism and corruption should be got rid of; democratic thinking and principled writing should shine forth; the voice of the oppressed, dalits, women should be heard: these are our aspirations. Appa had shared them too. Indeed, they have a compelling significance for our times. We are struggling to make at least a part of these aspirations a reality.

In this era of globalization, we find ourselves in a situation far more complex than any seen before. Necessary to the struggles we are waging is an understanding of the links between globalization and communalism, privatization and casteism, economic liberalization and the further marginalization of the oppressed social groups. We need a deep understanding of the situation, great integrity and a maturity to face up to any storm and fight on. Without such an understanding and maturity, it is hard to even dream of equality and coexistence in this era of transition.

I am grateful to every member of my team who has worked harder than me to build and nurture this institution over the last ten years. Especially to Raju and Satish who have been with me from the start, Girish Talikatte who now takes on as much work as I do, to Kishore and Umesh who work sincerely without giving me any trouble, Prasad who manages so many things quietly, our little friend at office, Lakshmana… This institution cannot take a single step forward without you. Thank you, boys!

I am grateful to Vivekananda Tandela who sends his articles without fail every week and to Ra. Somanath and Doddipalya Narasimhamurthy who seem to have resolved to send in their articles only after raising my blood pressure every Thursday. The weekly owes its popularity to you too. Thanks to you!

I would like to thank H.L. Keshavamurthy, whom Appa loved, B. Chandregowda who is always brimming with enthusiasm for life, my *manasa putra*, Dr H.V. Vasu, Suresh Bhat

Bakrabail who has given much more to *Patrike* than what he got from it, Yogesh Master who is as good as a member of our team now, Dr Chinnesh who has given a new dimension to *Patrike* and my 'communal harmony' friend, Ramzan Darga—all of you have enriched *Patrike* through your writings. Thank you!

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This journey would not have been possible but for my lawyer friends B.T. Venkatesh, Purushottam Poojari, Javed from Dharwad, Sripal and Nagesh from Shivamogga, Vilas Kumar from Gulbarga, Sudhir from Koppa, K.G. Nayak from Siddapura, Maruti from Tumkur, Raghavendra from Sagar, Pradeep from Tirthahalli, Sunil from Mangaluru… Many, many, thanks!

You could say A. Balachandra, the owner of Rajahans Press, is part of our family. *Patrike* used to be printed in his famous Press when Appa was alive. He was a great admirer of Appa and has the same concern for me, knowing well my difficulties. For this reason he prints everything from this Akka's institution at a concessional rate. He reminds me about the bill only when the payment is long overdue. My heartfelt thanks to him.

I thank all my friends who have patted my back and encouraged me, lent money and helped me and spurred me on whenever I felt I could no longer go on over the last ten years.

My loving thanks to my vendor friends all over Karnataka who have sold *Patrike* and our other publications.

Above all, a big salaam to all our readers who bought *Patrike* and our other publications and helped us survive. No amount of hard work by me or anyone else would have been of any avail were it not for you.

Come this Sunday to say a 'meow' to Appa and *Patrike* on their birthday. This is my hearty invitation to you all.

18 March 2015, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Bageshree S.

Profiles

Appa

It was the Annual Sports Day at my school.[1] I had asked my parents to come for it. As I had done well in the preliminary round of the sprint, I felt certain about winning in the final. Seeing my confidence, my parents readily came to watch me win a medal.

But I stumbled during the run. Before I could recover, the race ended. Having bragged about my chances, I felt so humiliated that I wept loudly to disguise it in a bid for sympathy. Amma tried to console me on the way home. Appa remained silent.

In the evening, Appa brought me a book of short stories. He handed it to me saying, "What does it matter that you didn't win the race? Here is a medal for your effort from my side."

I was ten years old then. That was my first book of stories. However, the addiction for stories had already set in. I pestered my father at bedtime every night: "Tell me a story, Appa!" I remember him telling me stories from *Aesop's Fables*. "The Lion and the Mouse" was my most favorite among them all. I have kept pestering Appa for books until now: taking blank checks from him in my college days to buy books from Premier Book Shop, all the way to pilfering books from his bookshelf.

When I was a child, I used to call Appa 'owl'. Even after the rest of us had gone to bed, he would read or write through the night. After a few years, Amma started calling both of us owls. Tired of seeing us chase books every night, she drove us into a room, "Father and daughter can read as long as they want." This would delight Appa and me. Unfortunately, this amicable arrangement of sharing a room with my father did not last too long.

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[1] Gauri's first attempt to write in Kannada, this essay appeared in *Talemarina Talamala: A Collection of Writings on the Life and Works of Lankesh* (Editor) Gangadhar Kushtagi, Kavitha Prakashana: Raichur, 1997.

My father was curious about the books I read but remained clueless about my class grade in school. If someone asked him about my class grade, he would turn to me, "What grade are you in?"

My sister, brother and I knew that our father was unusual. Our exam performance didn't matter to him. Whenever a concern about our thin bodies led Amma to make us eat more ("Please eat properly"), he chided her, "Why do you bother them? If they go without food for a couple of days, they will feel its need on their own."

But Appa was never indifferent towards us. He probably felt we ought to grow up on our own, experiencing pain alongside the joys of life. We are adults now. We have erred on several occasions. But, I think, to an extent, we have become what Appa wanted us to be: decent individuals. More importantly, we have tried to be better human beings.

In many ways, Appa is no different at home from outside. If he acquires an interest in oil-pulling, for instance, he coaxes Amma to try it as well. He grunts at home the same way he does at office. If he is in a good mood, he lets out a 'meow' with a laugh. Otherwise, the anger shows on his face. We had to gauge his mood before speaking with him. A good mood meant all applications were sanctioned. Otherwise, we had to wait for another day. My requests for books and khadi clothes, though, got clearance at any time.

The funny thing is that everyone considers Appa fearless. But he does have his fears. Not about anything big but about minor things like changing light bulbs. He is so phobic about electricity that he hasn't changed a single light bulb in his life. Although Appa is aware of contemporary technological developments, he has no patience with their details. If he wishes to watch television, one of us, or the house maid, has to turn it on and set the channel for him. Other than turning it off on the remote control, he knows little else.

Appa and I relate to each other through the writings of Marquez or Isabel Allende. But all kinds of witty exchange happen between my sister and him. She calls me at work almost everyday and exclaims, "Appa came up with a fantastic dialogue today," before recounting the whole episode. They share an incredible sense of humour and wit.

Appa and my brother, Ajitu, bond over their love of sports. Starting with the Wimbledon matches in the evening and through the US Open telecast at midnight, they watch tennis and argue about it.

None of the three siblings takes after Appa. We might share a few of his characteristics, but we understood Appa's multifacted character better than anyone could.

My mother, like my grandmother, is like a bear.[2] Like a modern bear, perhaps, to an extent. She has protected, nourished, encouraged and cared for my father and the three of us so many times, in so many ways. She has always been there for all of us.

Many of my father's friends and well-wishers have never seen Amma. There are many reasons for it. One, Amma is a very shy person. Second, she is a success in her own right. As an understanding spouse, as a splendid mother and, above all, as a successful business woman.

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[2] P. Lankesh's famous poem, *Avva* (1963) likens his mother's nurturing ways to those seen in a forest bear, free from the prescriptions of tradition. See "Mother" translated by AK Ramanujan in *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* edited by Vinay Dharwadker and A. K. Ramanujan, New Delhi, 1997.

The love and the friction between my parents were both unusual. Amma might not relate with Appa's intellectual world. And, he might not have the patience for the everyday challenges of her life. Whether Appa's ragi mudde had stayed hot or not was however a daily anxiety for Amma. Similarly, Appa constantly cared about Amma's health. Since both of them suffer from high blood pressure, Appa does his dietary experiments on her!

For me, the mutual respect they share is the special feature of their relationship. Both of them have given each other space to develop as individuals. They have also given their three children the same space to develop.

By the way, I totally forgot to mention something. Amma's name is Indira. Appa's name is Lankesh.

*

In the last years of Appa's life, when his health started declining, he was not only our father but also became like our child. When he lost the sight in one of his eyes, we forbade him from driving any more. That was the first freedom he lost. Until we found a driver, my sister and I took turns at being his driver. Having enjoyed driving his car, he found it difficult being only a passenger. If I drove a little fast, he would scold me. If I drove slow, he would criticize me, "What? Is this a bullock cart?" Whatever his complaint, I wouldn't listen. But it was different with my sister. When Appa criticized her driving, she hit back, "You are free to get off and take an auto." Though shocked to hear this, he recovered quickly, "Ha, ha, ha." He then stopped criticizing our driving.

I would take him to his favorite horse races. Once, as we drove through Cubbon Park, we passed a guava seller by the road side. He kept turning back to look towards him. He wanted to eat a guava, but couldn't ask for it due to his dietary restrictions. Feeling sorry for him, I asked, "Did you want a guava?" "Yes," he nodded. I stopped the car and bought one for him. I still remember the joy with which he ate it. When I went back to pick him up at the scheduled time, he was already waiting outside. He had lost all his money early. Feeling sorry to see him waiting on the side of the road, I started going there half an hour before he needed to be picked up. Once, unaware that I had already reached there, he was walking around, eating the groundnuts he had bought from a street vendor. He threw the packet behind him as soon as he saw me, and sat in the car. "What are you eating?" I asked. "Nothing," he smiled.

An unforgettable incident occurred when Appa had been admitted to St. John's Hospital. I had gone to the canteen to have some coffee. Appa was by himself in the room. When I returned, in ten minutes, the room was in total disarray. Biscuits, fruits and newspapers were scattered everywhere. I saw Appa panting on the bed. I was alarmed. "What happened?" I asked. "You hadn't closed the balcony doors properly. The monkeys did this. I wasn't able to drive them out." I felt terrible about what I had done and stayed silent for several hours. Noticing my pain, Appa couldn't keep quiet for long. He said, "When you aren't here, Kavitha and I feed the monkeys biscuits and fruits every day. I was inside the toilet when they came today. They created a mess before I came out. When I tried to chase them away, they tried to attack me."

I was furious, "Don't you both know the difference between monkeys and dogs? They rushed into the room because you have spoilt them. It is your mistake, not mine."

He smiled and kept quiet.

Checking Appa's sugar level was my responsibility. Kavitha kept an eye on the liver tests while Ajithu checked his blood pressure… We had distributed the responsibility of caring for him this way. If anything went wrong with any of these three things, we would force him to get admitted to a hospital. His admission to the hospital meant the admission of all of us there. This is why Appa never said, "I'll get admitted to the hospital tomorrow." Instead, he would say, "Let us all get admitted to the hospital tomorrow."

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Whoever it might be, how one is sent off from this world is as important as how one lived in it. As I mulled over this, I remembered Appa.[3]

When I saw Appa, after rushing back from Delhi that day [25 January 2000], one of his arms was raised slightly as if to bid goodbye. He was in his favorite blue sweater. I could see, even through my tears, that something was amiss. I knew what that was the very next instant. At the same time, my sister, Kavitha, tugged at me, "Wipe off the vibhuti, Gauri." Someone had smeared vibhuti on Appa's forehead. Finding it hard to touch Appa's body that had turned cold, my sister had waited for my arrival. I felt angry amidst the sorrow. Other than during his childhood, my father had never worn vibhuti. Or done a puja. Or tied a linga. When such a person lay helpless, and unable to respond, someone had smeared vibhuti on his forehead. Wiping that off right then, I cried, "No one should touch my father. Don't do these things."

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[3] From "Heegondu Marana Patra," *Gauri Lankesh*, July 29, 2009.

These things didn't end there though. It became a chore to see that my father's elder brother, Shivarudrappa, and the other relatives, who came the following day, didn't insult him. We kept extra-vigilant to not let them offer puja to Appa or apply kumkuma or vibhuti on him.

When we took Appa's body to the farm, someone had already made a bier. The idea, it seemed, was to carry Appa's body from the van in it. My sister and I immediately asked that it not be brought anywhere near our father. While Appa's body was inside the farmhouse, a few started doing pujas around a pit that had been dug under a mango tree. A shocked colleague of my father came running, "Are you burying him in the traditional lingayat way? He was opposed to it." "No," I clarified, "Amma felt a simple puja was needed. That's all. Tradition isn't involved here. I have already told them not to touch the body." But the situation wasn't that simple.

My paternal uncle and his son, Nagaraju, objected, "What is this? The burial pit hasn't been dug in the lingayat way." Try hard as we might to persuade them, they wouldn't listen. My uncle raised another issue: "It isn't proper to lay the body straight. The legs have to be folded and the body put in a sitting position according to our tradition."

Appa had been dead for about thirty-six hours. So I asked, "What? Will you now break Appa's arms and legs?" My uncle coolly said, "He won't feel any pain." I wasn't sure whether I should cry or get angry. I emphatically put the matter to rest: "I don't know about these things. But nobody can violate my father's beliefs. You should feel thankful that we let you do any kind of puja at all."

Things were coming to a close. Only the pit remained to be filled with earth. At that time, someone who stood beside Appa's body inside the pit produced a linga from somewhere and tied it around his neck. I was furious. I shouted, "Remove it. Remove it, right now!"

At this time, the drummers, whom my uncle had arranged for, started beating their drums loudly. My voice was drowned by the noise. My enraged sister screamed, "Ask the drummers to stop." Since Prakash Rai had also joined her, they stopped the drumming. We asked the person inside the pit to remove the linga he had tied. He heard us this time. He had no option but to remove it.

Forget caste traditions, we stayed faithful to Appa's tradition. Paper and pen, a cigarette pack and matches, a bottle of Black Label Scotch whisky, a book on horse-race betting, playing cards, a novel, all of which had been central to Appa's tradition, we bid him farewell with these.

The following day, my mother took many of Appa's favorite sweets and snacks to the burial site. Someone must have advised her to do this, or she might have wanted to follow some custom (although even she didn't believe in tradition). Putting a few obbattu and some lemon rice on a plate, she left it in the open for the crows. Much time passed, but there was no sight of a crow. My sister and I joked, "Appa must be shouting from below against this absurdity. That's why the crows aren't showing up." In the end, we gave the food to the two cows that were dear to Appa and returned home.

Translated by Chandan Gowda\

Amma

My mother, Indira, is seventy-two years old. She has written only one book in her life. That has now won the B. Saroja Devi Prize for Literature. Since this book, *Hulimaavu mattu Naanu* (A sour mango and I), which is about the forty years of her married life with my father, was serialized in these pages, I don't need to introduce it to my readers.

But I will share a few words about the background to this book. G.P. Basavaraju of *Mayura* (a monthly) was the reason it happened. He had planned to bring out a special issue on Appa. He asked Amma and me to write for it. Amma hesitated at first, "No, I cannot write." Letters to her relatives and keeping the accounts of her successful sari shop were the only writing she had done until then.

Since I persuaded her too, she wrote a piece called "Scooter Days". I had edited it lightly before sending it to *Mayura*. The essay was about the efforts Appa and Amma had made to buy a scooter, the time they had spent traveling on it, and so on. It was liked by many readers. That was when the *Lankesh* team felt that a book on my father by a person who had lived with him for forty years would bring out the other dimensions of his character.

None of us could guess there was a writer in her. Initially, we suggested that she narrate her story and someone write it down. Who would do that though?

I was too busy to offer to do it myself. K. Akshatha, who had done a fine job on the just published autobiography of [the farmers' leader] Kadidal Shamanna, *Kaadu Toreya Jaadu*

(The Trail of the Forest Stream) lived far from Bangalore. The others whose names occurred to us were either busy or lived in far off places. And so work on the book got pushed back by a few years.

In the end, I told Amma, "Start noting down your memories whenever you find the time. Let's think about the book later." Amma started writing. A few days later, she gave me a few sheets of her notes and said, "Can you see how they read?"

They read very well.

When Amma can write this well, I regretted having spent so much time looking for a scribe. We decided to publish her account in the weekly from the very next week. But what about the title? Since Rajeshwari had already published *My Tejasvi*[1] we felt a different kind of title was necessary. 'Lankesh and I' seemed bland. I thought for a while. Since Appa's autobiography was titled *Hulimaavina Mara* (A Sour Mango Tree), I felt 'Hulimaavu Mattu Naanu' (A Sour Mango and I), would be a good title for the column. Amma liked it too.

Indira was the most disciplined columnist I have seen in my career as an editor. She sent in her column while the deadline was still a few days away. If she needed to travel, she would write her piece before leaving town.

Amma's writings became popular very soon. Many readers would go to her column before anything else in the weekly. After she ended her column, I felt that the book should be released in Shivamogga, where my parents were from. Amma is such a shy character, she asked, "Will I need to come for the book release?" "Just come," I said. She did, along with Esha, my niece.

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[1] The reference is to Rajeshwari Tejasvi's biography of her husband and famous writer, Purnachandra Tejasvi.

*

It is necessary to describe how my mother raised us. When we were small, there was no limit to the love or the beatings she showered on us. The tiniest of our problems made her anxious. But, if the school report card showed low scores, she would rain blows on us. (Appa never hit us.) Games, storybooks and such came only after the homework was done. She too would not sit down to read till after finishing all the house work. To this day, in our home, most of us can be found with a book in hand around lunch time. Highly disciplined even now, she tried to get us to cultivate it too. (Only my sister picked it up, but discipline and I are far removed from each other.) Amma forced us to finish our food without leaving a single morsel uneaten. (My brother never picked up this habit.)

More than anything else, Amma taught my sister and I our first lessons in feminism. She doesn't know the history of the women's movement, its philosophy or its leaders. She had learnt from her own experience. That the lack of education and financial independence makes women lean on men, suffer insults, was one of the lessons she learnt. This is why she often advised us affectionately, "You must study hard and stand on your own feet." Sometimes, she issued strict orders.

On one occasion, when she caught me with my boyfriend, she had slapped me and put me under house arrest for two days. It is common for families to start searching for eligible boys when girls reach the end of their teens. But in our case, my mother raised the issue of marriage only after we had finished our studies and started earning an income from a job.

Amma's struggles and victories in life were all thrilling. On the one hand, she hadn't studied beyond PUC [pre-university course, twelfth grade]. On the other, she had no skill or training that would get her a job. She bore the responsibility of raising three children. When her husband went after another woman, she had thrown away her mangalsutra. 'What must I do to lead a self-reliant and contented life? Where must I go?' She was thirty-three years old when such questions confronted her.

That was when she started selling saris from home, and saw the enterprise grow into a big shop... My mother who continues to live a life of independence and self-respect has, in her seventy-second year, won a prize for literature. This Indira is not an ordinary woman.

Hearty congratulations to Kusakooru Somasundar Indira Lankesh! I am grateful to Appa and you for raising us. Love you very much.

22 April 2015, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Chandan Gowda

Chenni

Appa's beloved Chenni died two weeks ago. She was about thirteen years old and had reached the end of her life. She—who in her last days had given up food and refused human contact—will be buried in Amma's Nelamangala farm today.

This Chenni was Appa's much-loved Doberman. After Raja and Steffi, she was the dog who won Appa's heart. Every morning, when Appa returned from his walk, she would enter the house with him. While Appa's massage was going on, Chenni would sit on the sofa that he had laid out especially for her. While he ate his breakfast, she would eagerly wait beside him for the pieces of chapati he gave her.

Chenni was especially delighted when Appa returned home at night. She would enter the house with him, stay while he finished his whisky and dinner, and keep him company until he lovingly let her outside. No matter how Chenni messed up the house, none of us could fuss about it. Because, to Appa, she was the queen of the house. If Appa happened to be home and she had not been allowed inside, she would throw such a tantrum that we had to open the door to quieten her. The moment the door opened, she would go up to Appa, sniff him, lick his face all over and settle down only after she had rubbed herself against his legs.

It was this Chenni, who experienced the same painful loss that all of us did on 25 January 2000. That day, as thousands of people came to see Appa for the last time, Chenni was kept in her kennel. Amidst all the surrounding noise, she suffered her pain alone. That night, when Appa's body was taken away from home, it was Chenni who cried the loudest. Even to this day, I remember her wail of protest from inside her kennel.

Do you know what was most strange? Chenni did not enter the house after Appa passed away. Even when we opened the door wide and said, "Come in, Chenni", she would look at us for a moment and become quiet. If keeping her out of the house was a problem while Appa lived, it became impossible to bring her in once Appa was not around, no matter what we did. Finally one day, Amma carried her to Appa's room, study and bathroom, letting her sniff around, saying, "See Chenni, your Appa is not here now. But this is Appa's room." Chenni looked around the room for a few moments, then escaped from Amma's hands and ran out. She did not want to be in a house where her beloved Appa was not…

Chenni stayed there keeping much to herself, minding her own business for the next year or two. In this period, she gave birth to seven puppies, becoming a mother for the first time in her life. My little nephew, Samar, had been delighted to see her pups. But a few days later, Chenni shifted camp to Appa's farm.

There, her life became hell. Seeing her tied up all day made my sister sad. Later, when Appa's farm was sold, we moved Chenni to Amma's farm in Nelamangala.

Chenni recovered miraculously there. She spent her time guarding the farm, following me around whenever I visited. But two months ago, when the caretaker Kallappa left the farm, and the cattle were moved to lawyer Jayaram's farm nearby, I brought Chenni to my house.

My frequently burgled house now had a guard dog, and Chenni did keep the thieves away. She was content even with the little care I could offer amidst my chaotic life.

But her life was coming to an end. Several diseases arrived with old age. She stopped eating; refused medicines. Towards the end, only the injections and glucose that the vets gave kept her alive. When the vets said she would not live for much longer, I took her back to Amma's farm.

There, Chenni who had managed to live only on water for four days, finally breathed her last. The other day, when I took little Esha, my niece, to the farm, she asked, "Where is Thatha's dog, Chenni?" My Amma said, "Like Thatha, Chenni too has now become a star".

"Why?" was little Esha's question.

"She had had enough here. She wanted to be with Thatha. So she went. Now, every night, just the way your Thatha appears in the sky and looks down at you, Chenni too will appear with him and look at you," said Amma.

23 August 2006, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Sushma Veerappa

B.V. Karanth

I called up B.V. Karanth as soon as I heard that he had taken seriously ill. I have known him since I was a little girl.

"How are you?" I asked.

"The allopaths have given up. Now I am taking some treatment at home," he said.

"Please tell me if you need anything. We're all here for you," I said.

"I don't need anything. Just take good care of *Patrike*. That is good enough," he said. I didn't know what to say.

Recently, I went along with my friend, Jayant Kaikini, who was going over to Karanth's house to hand him a music cassette.

When I was little, Amma and Appa had stayed in Karanth's house in Delhi for a few days. I believe Prema Karanth was very tickled by the letter I had written to Amma in my poor English. Later, when Prema and Karanth had returned to Bengaluru, he had put his arm round me and told my father in jest, "Lankesh, we don't have children. You have two daughters anyway. Why don't you let us adopt Gauri?" My father had laughed and said, "Sure, you can take her!"

When Karanth's theatre troupe, Pratima Nataka Tanda, put up three plays on the Ravindra Kalakhetra premises, my sister, Baby, and I had done the roles of the children of Oedipus (played by Girish Karnad) in my Appa's play, *King Oedipus and Antigone*. It had been smooth going because the roles had no lines. When we tried to audition for Chandrashekhar Kambar's play *Sangya Balya* but felt too intimidated and fumbled with dialogues, Karanth had not been impressed and gave us both the 'gate pass'!

I met him several years later when he came to Vijaya High School, where I was studying, to direct a play. All those who hoped for a role had to stand before a mike and introduce themselves. I had introduced myself deliberately adding my father's name to mine, lest he failed to recognize me. Karanth had smiled at my cleverness and given me a role. I had to play the Queen of Hearts in Rabindranath Tagore's play, *The Kingdom of Cards*. I realized acting was not for me! Appa had come to watch the play and I nearly fainted with fright seeing him in the first row. Later he had said, "You looked very nice, but I couldn't hear any of your dialogues." That was the end of my experiments in theatre.

I next met Karanth when I was studying in Delhi. He had come with his harmonium for a drinking session and entertained us with his singing till midnight. Thereafter, I met him only as a journalist. When I met him at the Rangayana repertory in Mysuru when he worked there, he appeared happy to see me but did not exude the same warmth as of old. "This is what the Bhopal event has done to me," he said with regret, looking straight into my eyes.

Karanth took years to recover from the unfortunate episode in Bhopal.[1] Prema Karanth had said, "Those were really horrifying days for us. Karanth was sometimes depressed for weeks on end." But his dreams had begun to sprout again with Rangayana.

Some years later, I met him at a village near Hyderabad where he was teaching Brecht's *Mother Courage* to a professional Telugu theatre troupe. He was screaming in Hindi, the actors' dialogues were being spoken in Telugu and the translator was caught in distress between the two. Karanth's great enthusiasm for theatre was obvious everywhere. "I began my theatre days with the professional theatre troupe of Gubbi Veeranna. Then I went wandering all over. Finally, I am back with a professional troupe," he had said.

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[1] In 1986, B.V. Karanth, who was helping build Rang Mandal, a theatre repertory, at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, had to face charges of murder. Discussed widely in the media, the controversy ended after the charges against him were dropped in court.

All these memories flashed through my mind when he held my hand as I sat beside his bed.

"Is the *Patrike* running in profit?" he asked. "My brother is not rich enough to run it at a loss," I said. "Congratulations, I am glad you are keeping your father's *Patrike* going!" he said.

He started reminiscing about his days in Banaras with Ankur, the present director of the National School of Drama, who was also there. Like a little child he refused the gruel that his long-time associate Holla was trying to make him drink. He looked for a Pink Floyd cassette, insisting that Kaikini should listen to it. He fretted over the high cost of treatment for his illness. Though talking tired him and gave him bouts of hiccups, he would slowly recover and continue speaking...

Our conversation turned to *Karanthara Kathana* which Vaidehi had completed. "An important chapter, about Prema, has got left out of the narration. She has put up with me for so long. It would be dishonest not to have a chapter on her in my autobiography... Prema has nurtured me..." he said.

"You get well first. Then you can add that chapter. There is enough time for all that. Health is your priority now," said Kaikini, trying to console him.

"No, no, it would be really wrong if there is nothing about Prema..." he insisted again and again.

"Let your health improve first. Then I will come and jot down what you have to say about Prema," said Kaikini. That seemed to calm him a little. Like a little child, he asked, "Promise?"

The way he extracted the 'promise' showed that Karanth, who was born in poverty but had overcome the challenges through his immense talent and acquired great popularity, still retained his innocence.

That day he played just for us a song by Shakti, a band that popularized fusion music. "How relaxing it is!" he said, continuing to hold my hand, as he lost himself in the song.

28 August 2002, *Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Bageshree S.

Baba Amte

There was news of Baba Amte visiting National College, Basavanagudi when I was doing my pre-university course there. He was leading the Bharat Jodo campaign to unite the country from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat, and spread the message of peace and environmental protection.

I had heard that the old man was without a backbone and so had to either lie down or stand. No one however had been able to break the spirit of this 'spineless' man. I was really curious to see him.[1]

It was an afternoon in 1978. Baba Amte and hundreds of his young companions entered our college premises on bicycles. As we gathered in the quadrangle, a cot was placed on the stage. Baba, who got on to the stage, lay down on the cot until the welcome address and other formalities were over. We were all thrilled when he finally stood up to speak. We felt proud to see ourselves as the future of the country. I felt like joining the Bharat Jodo campaign the same day, but was held back by fear of my mother's disapproval.

About twenty-one years later, I got an opportunity to spend two days in his Anandvan Ashram, interview him and interact with his wife and two children. I was working in ETV's Delhi office and had just returned from South Africa where I had visited Gandhi's first ashram, Phoenix, near

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[1] Following two operations for cervical spondylosis in the 1970s, Baba Amte could no longer sit up straight and could stand only for short stretches.

Durban, and thought it would be a good idea to visit his last ashram at Sevagram in Maharashtra. On the way I decided to stop at Anandvan and interview Baba.

It was about 10.30 in the night when I reached Anandvan. A worker at the ashram showed me to my room and said that my interview with Baba had been fixed for the morning. The tidy little room had nothing besides a cot, a table and an iron chair. It was the occupant's responsibility to keep the room clean as per the ashram rule, and so, there was a broom, a bucket and a mop.

I cleaned the room in the morning and got ready by 8. Baba had woken up at 4.30 and finished his walk, bath and breakfast. He and his wife, Sadhana, treated me with such warmth that I felt as though I was their daughter. Baba showed me around Anandvan. The ashram, which housed leprosy patients, was astonishingly clean.

People from all over the country, including many from Karnataka, were in the weaving, gardening and carpentry sections of the ashram. Everyone, including guests like me, ate together and then washed their own plates.

I toured around the ashram in Baba's ambulance-like vehicle. The video cameraman who had accompanied me, would record Baba at work: enquiring after the patients, advising his assistants and so on. I stood beside my colleague to avoid getting into the frame. Baba however would ask me to be by his side: "Gauri, aa jao idhar (Come here, Gauri)." He would hold my hand and ask me to walk with him.

He pointed to a thick patch of trees and said, "Reach there by 6 in the evening and you will see something amazing. Later we can have dinner together."

I was there on time. The sun was setting. After a little while, a few birds came flying from different directions. Their numbers swelling to thousands in no time, they returned to their little ones in the nests shortly thereafter. The air was filled with bird calls. It was one of the most memorable communions I have had with nature. When I went to Baba's place later, he asked me "How was it?" with the glee of a little boy who has just shown a magic trick.

When I returned to Anandvan the next day, after visiting Sevagram, I met Baba's sons, Vikas and Prakash. I spoke to them at length about Baba's formative years, the various experiences that had shaped his life and so on. I was to return to Delhi in the morning, but Baba insisted that I stay back. "Why the hurry?" he asked. I yielded to him and stayed back for an extra day.

Baba had received hundreds of awards and honors in his lifetime, and yet he remained a very humble man. His honesty, service-mindedness, fighting spirit and the goodness to treat everyone with love were touching. The man who dedicated his life to the cause of leprosy patients jumped into the agitation when the Narmada dam threatened to render thousands homeless. He lived with his wife in a small hut-like building next to the river for long, ready to be submerged under water, even as his health deteriorated. He had no option but to return to Anandvan when he was found to have blood cancer.

I am pained that the man who was a symbol of affectionate care and nonviolence and an inspiration for social struggles is no longer with us, even as I feel grateful for the two days I got to spend with him.

20 February 2008, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Bageshree S.

K.P. Purnachandra Tejasvi

I don't know where to begin or what to say as memories come in a rush, jostling each other... Do I talk about the love Purnachandra Tejasvi showered on me despite his quarrel with Appa? About the affection he showed even as he grumbled that I was a pest? About his reprimands to me for not grasping the complexity of things? About him often agreeing with me in the end: "Yes, you are right too. The whole thing is rotten"? So many memories... And the sighs they bring...

My father was always lost in the world of his *Patrike*, his writings and his circle of friends. Our time with him was limited to home and we rarely met his friends. In fact, I met and built contacts with many of his friends and former friends only after I became a journalist.

But Tejasvi was an exception in this regard. His estate at Mudigere was the reason. By the time Appa began to make a monthly visit to his estate, after starting the *Patrike*, we children were grown up enough to not need Amma standing guard to keep us from bothering him. Now, he often took us along on his trips to Mudigere.

On one such trip I had taken a Rubik's Cube—which was quite a rage then—for Tejasvi's children. "Why did you bring this?" he laughed when he saw what I had with me. "I wasted an entire night trying to solve it."

It was a big house with a large, beautiful garden all around, full of flowering plants, big trees, coffee shrubs and a small lake at the back where a tortoise made a regular annual appearance. The chill in the air and the rains gave us such joy that we eagerly awaited these visits.

Once, Appa was sipping his morning coffee sitting on the steps to the courtyard. Standing opposite, Tejasvi was taking pictures of him. He asked that I—who had just woken up and stepped outside—sit next to Appa. I kneeled down behind and rested my chin on his shoulder. The picture Tejasvi took that day is very dear to me. It hangs in my office.

That day he took many pictures of my sister and me, developed them in the dark room, signed on their back and gave them to us as we were leaving. Tejasvi's craze for photography gradually caught up with Appa. He would constantly take pictures of us and of those who came to the office. The money that Tejasvi and Appa spent on this hobby wasn't little!

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The first story my sister, Baby [Kavitha], chose to adapt into a film was Tejasvi's *Kirugoorina Gayyaligalu*. We both drove to Mudigere early one morning to discuss the idea with him. His wife, Rajeshwari, had cooked fantastic non-vegetarian food for us. I was thrilled but Baby was flustered as we sat down for lunch. I happily gorged on mutton and fish, while she had to be content with fried vegetables and curds.

When we sat down to discuss the film, he said, "Making a film is a big headache. I had gone to watch the shooting of *Tabarana Kathe* and nothing can be more boring than that! How do you plan to turn *Gayyaligalu* into a film? I think it's rather difficult, think about it..." We talked till evening, went on a stroll around the garden and got back. We both felt that he was not happy with the idea of *Gayyaligalu* being made into a film. Later, Baby adapted Appa's novella, *Akka*, into a film under the title, *Deveeri*, and won international acclaim and awards in her debut attempt.[1]

Later, when it was time for me to leave for a six-month trip to the US, I was halfway through Tejasvi's novel, *Jugari Cross*. Suddenly I wondered why I should not try to translate it. I packed a Kannada–English dictionary along with my luggage. I translated the whole novel while I was in the US.

By the time I returned, Appa and Tejasvi had fought and stopped talking to each other. I called Tejasvi with a lot of hesitation and told him that I had translated his novel. Whatever may have been his quarrel with Appa, he spoke to me with the same affection and said, "My English isn't good enough to tell the quality of your translation. But do send it to me. I'll read it and let you know what I think." He did read it as promised over the next few days and called back. "You have done a good translation. It only needs a bit of repair work here and there," he said encouragingly.

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After Appa passed away, and I took on the responsibility of editing the *Patrike*, I wrote to Tejasvi several times asking him to write for us again. "Look, I have a lot of love for you but your Appa has hurt me a lot. I can never write for the weekly again. Don't bother me like this." It was a rebuff, but conveyed with undisguised affection.

I, of course, wouldn't let him be! Once, my friend Chandan Gowda and I went to his house in Mudigere. We had got out of the car and were talking to Rajeshwari in the garden when Tejasvi appeared at the door. He had just returned from his plantation. That sight is still etched in my mind. The broad-shouldered, strong-limbed Tejasvi seemed giant-like. He stood there in a cotton shirt and blue jeans, with a rifle in his hand. "Both of you have arrived! Why are you so late?" he demanded to know. Almost as if he might have shot us if we argued. That scene is unforgettable.

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[1] *Deveeri* won Kavitha Lankesh the National Debut Director Award in 1999 and was shown at several international film festivals.

I published the interview I did with him that day and continued to pester him to write for us. I came up with a new plan when he would not relent. I called him one day and said, "I will send you a list of ten questions on contemporary issues. Can you write responses to them?" No sooner had he agreed, a few of my associates and I sat together and drew up a list of ten questions. Tejasvi called soon after he saw them.

"These questions are very good," he said. "Who came up with them?" "I did. Why?" I replied, not revealing the secret.

"You are lying to me... These are the kind of questions I cannot answer in three or four sentences. I will send you detailed answers for each of them," he said. I was absolutely thrilled.

We carried the answers Tejasvi sent us on a range of contemporary topics—economic liberalization, technology, Kannada literature and culture, coffee prices and several such—as a series over seventeen weeks. It was perhaps the only time Tejasvi engaged with these contemporary issues in such detail.

Tejasvi, having said he would never write for *Patrike* again, had started to do so. The task of ensuring his replies arrived in time fell on me. "This is such a headache! It feels as if I had replied to the questions only yesterday and it is the next week already. I had given up writing precisely because I cannot write every week and now you have given me this new headache," he would grumble, but send his responses in time. Though I had named the Tejasvi column, "Mudigere Post", the subject line in the emails he sent me every week always read "Nuisance." It was thus out of his love for me that Tejasvi wrote for us again.

18 April 2007, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Bageshree S.

Muthuraj / Rajkumar

My sister Baby [Kavitha] and I were taken aback the day Rajkumar suddenly entered the room we were in. As we watched him walk in wearing a white shirt and white panche, greeting everyone, we were embarrassed because we were changing clothes, and were caught in just our petticoats. Even so, we somehow greeted him with folded hands. He had patted our cheeks and moved ahead. We were both excited to see Rajkumar in person, but also embarrassed that we were barely clothed when we met him!

I was about ten years old, and my sister seven, when this incident occurred. That day, *King Oedipus and Antigone* [scripted by P. Lankesh] was the last play of the theatre festival organized by my father and his friends at Ravindra Kalakshetra. My sister, Kavitha, and I had acted as Oedipus' daughters. Both of us being extremely shy, all we had to do was hug Girish Karnad who played Oedipus, and cry. Our roles didn't have a single line!

After the play was over, along with the other actors, we (so young then that we had been herded into the men's green room) were getting out of our costumes when 'Natasarvabhouma' (Emperor of actors) Rajkumar made an entry. Although my young mind was disappointed to find Rajkumar without the moustache he sported in his films and wearing a panche like an ordinary villager, I still remember being amazed by his simplicity and the way everyone greeted him.

It is true that Rajkumar was, through his films, an important part of my life for many years. His films brought me and others of my generation immeasurable joy. Those of us who enjoyed the intimacy and sentimental nature of his films weren't yet capable of interpreting the values in those films in relation to the social realities of the time. Even after we had acquired such an understanding, we set aside our critical tendencies to celebrate the conferral of the Dadasaheb Phalke award on him [in 1995]. We organized a special 'Raj' party at Vivek Shanbhag's house. The highlight of that party was watching Rajkumar starrer *Mayura* on a VCR.

In much the same way that children's writer Enid Blyton was my childhood companion, Rajkumar's movies too have become a part of my memories. The main reason for this is my Amma. She would limit the number of movies we watched, so we invariably chose only Rajkumar's films and a few children's movies in English.

As I grew older, films in other languages enriched my life, as did a whole world of books, and Rajkumar's films remained sentimental symbols. For example, when I watched *Bhagyavantaru* (The fortunate ones) again after a few years, I was surprised that I had once cried over such a retrograde film. I continued to catch a Rajkumar film whenever possible, even during the two decades of my nomadic life. It makes me sad today that a mediocre film like *Shabdavedi* [2000] was the last film in his fantastic professional career.

I had begun my career in journalism just as the Gokak Agitation [of the 1980s] lost steam and was reducing itself to narrow linguistic pride. I still remember the moment Rajkumar exited the Gokak Agitation. Unable to condone the violence that the members of his Fan Association had done to the Tamilians in Kolar, he announced his withdrawal from it in a press conference he had convened at Hotel Ashoka. From that day onwards, Rajkumar the Kannada activist withdrew;

only Rajkumar the actor remained.

In this edition of the *Patrike*, Shivasundar has written about how and why a self-serving system transformed a Muthuraj into a Rajkumar. Muthuraj, who came from a backward, oppressed community, waged social struggles on the silver screen in a theatrical fashion, the way the film world wanted it. To elaborate, the struggles against class inequality that he led as "Rajkumar" invariably ended with him falling in love and then marrying the oppressor's daughter. The trade union leader would fall in love with the factory owner's daughter or the poor farmer would marry the landlord's daughter...these were the limitations and weaknesses of the roles he played as a hero. But the differences between the class struggles in the real world and their portrayal in these films are of course great. As Shivasundar says, this is not so much Rajkumar's failure as of those who used him for their status quoist politics. In his success lie hidden both the victory of the establishment and the defeat of realism.

More than the demise of the Rajkumar who had once impressed me with his films and awakened me to the inequalities and injustices of society, and in some way made me reflect critically, today I mourn the loss of Muthuraj, who earned the adulation of the people with his talent.

In the end, a lone truth remains. Being Rajkumar in public while staying Muthuraj in private all through his life, a simple individual from Doddagajanur had found his humanity as the Natasarvabhouma. Even though I was familiar with Rajkumar through his movies, my heart was more deeply touched by the innocent Muthuraj. My fond farewell to him.

26 April 2006, *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*

Translated by Sushma Veerappa

U.R. Ananthamurthy

I have admired and envied U.R. Ananthamurthy since I was young.[1] Though a famous literary figure, he spoke with young people as if they were his close friends. I admired this in him. And, I was envious that my father didn't get the national and international fame that he did. (While Appa didn't let this bother him, it certainly bothered me. Need I spell out that my love for Appa was behind it!)

My father was a rough-mannered man. A rural man. A man who lacked Western sophistication. Let alone traveling abroad, he hadn't visited most Indian states. But Ananthamurthy was different. He felt comfortable not just in Thirthalli but in New York as well. He could interact with different kinds of people. He had lived and traveled in numerous places abroad. Unlike my father, he was not short-tempered or quarrelsome and mixed freely with others.

While I tried to fathom why my father quarreled even with his friends and became lonely, I couldn't help feeling surprised at how Ananthamurthy interacted with people easily. Still, it would astonish me how two diametrically opposed personalities could share a mutual admiration.

I still remember what D.R. Nagaraj had said once while discussing the differences between my father and Ananthamurthy: "According to A.K. Ramanujan, the reason they quarrel with each other is: Lankesh wants to be like

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[1] "81st Birthday wishes to Ananthamurthy", *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, 1 January 2014.

Ananthamurthy and Ananthamurthy wants to be like Lankesh." To what extent might Ramanujan be right?

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"I am with you all. Please include my name in your list. If I'm feeling well, I'll join you…"[2] These were Ananthamurthy's last words to me. It must have been August 10 or 11. The Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum's national conference was being held that week. I had called to invite him to inaugurate the event. He had been pleased to hear that Teesta Setalvad, Anand Teltumbde, Subhash Gatade, among others, would discuss communalism and neo-liberal fascism. "Teesta is a solid woman," he said. "I have just written a hundred page book called *Hindutva or Hind Swaraj*? I really would like her to release the book."

I replied, "Teesta will be happy to release your book. If you won't be able to come on Saturday, I'll bring her to your house."

But I had to unexpectedly leave Bengaluru on Saturday and wasn't able to take Teesta to meet him. Six days later, Ananthamurthy died, leaving us all feeling orphaned.

A few months ago, M.M. Kalburgi's remarks that Ananthamurthy had urinated on religious idols as a boy had thrown up a controversy.[3] Deeply hurt by this episode, Ananthamurthy called me, "As a young boy, I had urinated on spirit idols (devvada kallu) to see if unknown forces beyond our understanding exist. I had later felt terrified. Misrepresenting this episode, they are now saying I urinated on idols of gods."

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[2] "Writing in the void Ananthamurthy left behind", *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, 10 September 2014.

[3] Addressing a seminar on the Anti-Superstition Bill held at Bangalore, Kalburgi had said 'there was nothing wrong in urinating on idols' adding that U.R. Ananthamurthy had once done the same.

"The minds of your opponents are like that. Please don't feel disheartened. Appa recalled a similar episode in his autobiography. Whenever plague or cholera struck his village, the villager would build a small chariot for Maramma, the village deity, and worship her. The chariot would be kept outside the village afterwards. Once, Appa and his two friends started a contest among themselves: who could successfully aim a stone at the deity from a distance? Appa could only strike the chariot, whereas the other two found their aim and knocked the idol off the chariot. A few days later, both of his friends succumbed to plague. Though Appa had also contracted the plague, he survived it. Wouldn't it be absurd if someone read about this incident, and said that Appa had asked his friends to pelt stones at God?"

"Yes, wouldn't it? I had forgotten about this episode. Thanks for reminding me about it," he said. "Come home next week. Let's talk."

G. Rajashekhar and Ramjan Darga sent in essays that put the issue of urinating on the idols in proper perspective. By featuring them prominently, *Patrike* showed its support for Ananthamurthy. I feel that this must have lessened his pain to an extent. He called me to express his thanks. I replied, "No, no. We only did our duty."

A few days later, Kalburgi's remarks landed Ananthamurthy in another controversy[4]. It pertained to the conferral of the Basava Award on him. Ananthamurthy called to share his unhappiness: "See, I come from a traditional family. I encountered the modern world later. It is not easy for me to say that God doesn't exist. I am still struggling to understand whether He exists or not. I grew up questioning the beliefs and practices of my caste and keep attempting to see truths outside them. Basava keeps haunting me. Initially, he found support for spreading his philosophy. A worry set in him later: Did those who stood by him believe in his philosophy? Basava ended up losing his life. The Buddha is a lot on my mind these days. If I had time, I would use it to understand him better."

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[4] When Ananthamurthy was conferred the Basava Award by the Government of Karnataka, Kalburgi had objected to that decision saying Ananthamurthy's work did not reflect the spirit of Basavanna. An adverse remark on Basava's views of caste equality by Ananthamurthy, which was later found to be a misattribution, had formed the basis of Kalburgi's objection.

His voice was shaky that day. I felt anxious that he might not be with us much longer.

Explaining that he had not erred in accepting the Basava Award, Ananthamurthy added, "The medical treatment costs Rs 80,000 a month. Where can I find that kind of money? The award money lets me afford the treatment."

It made me sad to hear him.

I would speak with Ananthamurthy over the phone now and then. But the last time I met him was two months ago. I had gone to his house with my friend, Chandan Gowda. Chandan and I had hoped that he might be free and we could discuss things for a couple of hours. But someone was recording an interview with him. He spoke to us whenever there was a break. As always, he spoke affectionately. But his body was tired. He found it difficult to get up from where he sat. When he stood up, his body looked frail.

Our intermittent conversation went on until afternoon. We weren't able to discuss anything at length. While the others got ready to leave, it was time for Ananthamurthy to have his medicines and lunch. As he ate, Chandan and I discussed Arundhati Roy's introduction to Ambedkar's *Annhilation of*

Caste with him. Since he rested in the afternoon, we got ready to leave. He praised my mother's book about her experiences with my father and the life she led with him: "She has written it very well. It brought back Lankesh to me."

I told him I would return to see him again soon, but that turned out to be my last meeting with him.

Ananthamurthy was senior to me in every way. But, over the last two years, he took part in our struggles against communalism with the same enthusiasm as ours. He was a guide, a leader.

When I heard he was no more, I was deeply haunted by the pain of having lost a fellow fighter.

Translated by Chandan Gowda

As a columnist

In death, a star's dawn

The last two weeks have been the most traumatic in my life.

It all began with the killing of two naxalites by the police in the Western Ghats on 6 February. As news trickled in, it became clear that one of the naxalites killed in the 'encounter' was the CPI (Maoist) state secretary, Prem. But the fact that Prem was none other than Saketh Rajan shocked many. From the colleges of Mysore to Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University campus, people started speaking of the intellectual brilliance of Saketh whom they had known nearly two decades ago before he went underground.

Even as the police gloated over the prize 'catch', people from various fields mourned Saketh's demise. Above all, many remembered and praised the two books he had published under the name 'Saki'. The two volumes of *Making History* are remarkable for looking at Karnataka's history from 'below'. Even Karnataka chief minister [2014–16] Dharam Singh said on record that he was "feeling terrible that such a brilliant man had been killed".

It was as if in death, Saketh had begun to shine as the new star in the Karnataka sky. The mapping of the intellectual and activist in one person—a rare combination in the recent political culture of Karnataka—has stirred the hope and imagination of a people who looked in vain for some ideal. That such a man had been brutally felled by the police created a sympathy wave for the naxal cause. It was then that the police panicked.

There is a personal touch to the story that follows. I knew Saketh when he was my senior at Bangalore University and at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi. He went underground sometime later. After two decades, he resurfaced last June (2006) at the first press conference of the naxalites in Karnataka where I was among the few invited journalists. It was then that I met Saketh again who had now taken on the alias of Prem. The press meet shattered a few of the myths being spread by the police. For one, they were not naxalites from Andhra Pradesh but were born and raised in Karnataka. Secondly, they were not some ragtag gang of misguided youth but a political party that had taken up the cause of tribals in the Kudremukh National Park. In their briefing, they said that they were ready for talks but wished that the government met some adivasi demands first.

Soon after this press conference the chief minister reacted positively, saying the naxal issue was not a law and order problem, but a socio-economic issue. It was against this background that the Citizen's Initiative for Peace (CIP) was formed. Our intention was to create a climate where the government and the naxals could initiate talks in the larger context of people's long-standing needs and development issues. It is important to note that the adivasis had been fighting against their eviction in the name of a national park and for their traditional rights. But successive governments had not addressed their demands.

While we appealed to the naxals to lay down arms, we also appealed to the government to cease combing operations as the first step towards holding talks. We were worried that the police, who had killed two women naxals in November 2003, would end up killing more. If that happened, there would certainly be a naxal backlash. Saketh's death triggered what we had feared for so long.

Soon after Saketh and his colleague were killed, the CIP approached the government with some demands. We sought an inquiry into the 'encounter'; appealed once again to stop combing operations; demanded a second post-mortem according to the National Human Rights Commission guidelines and the Supreme Court ruling. Finally, we said if no one claimed Saketh and the other youth's bodies, we would give them a decent funeral. Even though the chief minister agreed to hand over the bodies to us, the police and the administration put up legal blocks. They said they would hand over the bodies only to the immediate kith and kin of the dead persons. There was another problem. Since no one knew the young man who had been killed with Saketh, his identity was yet to be established. Some suspected it was Shivalingu, from Bellary, and his parents had been sent word to come and identify him.

That was when Saketh's aged mother came into the picture. Once I had assured her that we would not take Saketh's remains to Mysore, she said the government should hand over his body to us. While the police informed her that the chief minister had agreed to hand over Saketh's body to us, they made her sign a letter saying the government should dispose of the body. On the basis of this letter, the director general of police, S.N. Borkar, announced the police would themselves perform the last rites.

On television, Saketh's mother vented her fury against the police for deceiving her. She faxed a letter to the CM saying her son's body should be given to the CIP. By then the second post-mortem was completed and we were on our way to collect the bodies. It was then we got word that the police had left with the bodies for an unknown destination. Some activists at the morgue were brutally beaten up when they tried to block the police vehicles. We were told the police had taken them to the crematorium at Wilson Garden. We again got in touch with the chief minister who in turn tried to get in touch with the DGP. When we reached the crematorium, we couldn't find them. We came to know that the bodies had been taken to a crematorium at the other end of town and that, finally, the police themselves had conducted the last rites.

This high drama showed that the chief minister had no control over his police force, and exposed his specious excuse that there was a communication gap between him and the police chief.

In between, the police ensured that Shivalingu's poor and illiterate parents could not get in touch with us at all. To begin with, they were detained at a police station near Raichur and brought to Bangalore only at our insistence. They were kept at the police commissioner's office so that they could not get in touch with us. Even after the CM ordered they should meet us, the police whisked them away to an unknown location. To this day, no one knows where they are. And no one knows for certain about the identity of the other man killed in the encounter.

Whereas the CIP had tried to create an atmosphere for talks between the government and naxals, and had tried to ensure a decent burial for the naxals, the Sangh parivar started baying for our blood for 'supporting naxals'. Around the same time, the newspapers reported that the home department and the police were contemplating filing charges against us and would soon arrest us. To compound matters, the naxals retaliated by killing seven policemen in an attack on the Karnataka State Reserve Police near Pavagada on the Andhra border. This backlash created such a furor that soon everyone was demanding that we be arrested.

We were flummoxed. To begin with, we never approved of or supported the naxalites' armed struggle. More importantly, whatever we did was within the bounds of law and in keeping with the spirit of the Constitution. And yet we were accused of being the main cause for the policemen's deaths.

My brother fell for the machinations of the police and the Sangh parivar, and used the opportunity to oust me from the editorship of *Lankesh Patrike*. When my father, the late P. Lankesh started this weekly magazine, he did so to provide democratic space for the voiceless. Since its beginning in 1980, *Lankesh Patrike* has continued to fight vested interests and fascist forces. When my father passed away seven years ago, the only reason we continued publication was to ensure that this democratic space was not blocked and his legacy remained. That was when I took over as the editor and the family nominated my brother as the owner and publisher of *Lankesh Patrike*.

But over the last couple of weeks, the pressure from police and the Sangh parivar was so much that my brother decided not to publish my editorial, alleging that it was pro-naxal. The fact of the matter was that I had not yet written my piece.

What happened to me could have been ignored as a dispute within a family. But it became apparent that the Pavagada killings had much wider ramifications. These breezy events over ten days have shown how the state can close down on democratic space. The fear and suspicion remind one of the Emergency. As this piece is being written, university teachers are being quizzed for their views and activities. Phones are being tapped and policemen in mufti tail dissenters. It is assumed that the Indian state is tolerant and democratic. But the limits of this democratic space come to the fore only at moments of crisis such as the one described above.

It is in such moments that democratic voices need to stand firm. It's important to realize that democracy is more than votes and elections; it's a question of accommodating dissent. Questioning the state is an important aspect of this dissent that we think will help build a stronger democracy.

19 February 2007, *Tehelka*

Whose money is it anyway?

Over the last few years, one line of argument put forth during discussions around the state budget has alarmed me. The argument goes like this: since Bengaluru generates more than half of the state's revenues, it is reasonable to expect the state government to invest strongly in the development of the city. I am a dyed-in-the-wool Bengalurean and yet this train of thought appals me. Yes, Bengaluru—as the state's capital—needs good amenities, such as drinking water, sidewalks, neat roads, etc. But to say, 'Hey, that's our money which we paid in taxes. How dare you give it to others?' smacks of sheer arrogance.

Bengaluru generates more revenues since it is a city with a high concentration of professionals. But have these people ever thought of where all the amenities they consume with such greed come from? Bengaluru does not produce a single unit of power, yet consumes the most. Bengaluru has not even one major source of water, yet it consumes over twenty-five TMCs (thousands of million cubic feet) of water. Buildings that Bengalureans live in are not built by them but by the thousands of former farmers who have migrated to the city as laborers from faraway places, including Gulbarga and Raichur districts. In fact, Bengaluru sucks in resources from outside, digests the best portions, and throws out the waste.

Why should thousands of people in some backward district suffer air and water pollution so that the professionals in the city can have 24x7 power supply? Why should Kodagu—where the river Cauvery originates—suffer shortage of drinking water so that Bengalureans have enough to clean their cars? What will happen to the innumerable 'housing projects' if the labourers lay down their tools? If other people have sacrificed and suffered to keep Bengaluru going, is it not right that some of the revenues generated in the city are ploughed back to help them too? For the sake of argument, what would be the reaction of such people if I said: Koramangala generates excess garbage. So most of it should be given back to the people of Koramangala. I am sure they will say: No, no. Let's send it off to Mandur or some such godforsaken place. Money, like garbage, works both ways, folks! Both should be spread around; if not, they start to stink.

On a serious note, the logic that more money should be allocated to the place where it is generated is totally anti-democratic. The cardinal principle of democracy is not just one person one vote, but also equal rights and opportunities to all. To say 'our taxes, our development' goes against the very basic principles of a free republic.

It is the same kind of people who argue that subsidies to farmers are a waste of money. And that since the agriculture sector contributes 17 per cent of the GDP, only an equivalent amount of money—or less—should be spent on that sector. They also say that while subsidies given to the farming or weaving sectors are a waste of resources since they do not generate employment, giving subsidy to business houses makes sense since they generate copious employment opportunities.

This is way off the mark. Even today over 60 per cent of our population is still involved in activities which are directly or indirectly connected to the agriculture or weaving sectors. That is ten times more jobs than those provided by business houses.

Such people very conveniently mask the fact that the same 'tax paying' elite class is getting many kinds of subsidies directly or indirectly from the state and central governments. Some famous software firms based in Bengaluru are what they are today because of various kinds of 'concessions' made by the state government. If they had not got such 'financial breaks' those business houses would have shut down in the highly competitive 'free market'. Because a 'free market' knows no mercy.

My friend Shivasundar—a political analyst—pointed out to me that "in this year's Union budget, the big business houses are getting a whopping Rs 60,000 crores as direct subsidy and around Rs 5 lakh crores as indirect subsidy. This is two times the devolution of resources from the centre to state and three times the amount allocated to MNREGA and Rural Health put together."

I wonder, if these companies headed by such 'intelligent business leaders of world repute' and '*Forbes* listers' are doing so well, then why do they need such 'hand-outs' from the state? I wonder, if they did not have such 'alms' from the government, would their employees be able to pay their taxes? I wonder what would happen if Bengaluru could not collect their taxes... I wonder, if instead of showing them such generosity, the corporate subsidies were spent on improving the health and primary education sectors of our country, how democratic that would be.

I wonder whose money these fancy business houses and those working for such companies are laying their hands on.

Lay off, folks, that money is hard earned, it stands for the sweat of the toiling masses... How would you feel if they said: Hey, that's our money, how dare you give it to those people?

15 March 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

Language roots and English skies

Like most *Bangalore Mirror* readers, I too was provided an education in which English was the medium of instruction. As a result (even though my mother tongue is Kannada), I grew up thinking, dreaming, living and expressing myself in English. English made me fall in love with Enid Blyton, P.G. Wodehouse and Shakespeare among others. Even today, I learn about things happening around the world through English newspapers, news channels, and, of course, the various websites and blogs. Yet, I am batting for the mother tongue to be made the medium of instruction at the primary school level. Ah, yes, I can hear your collective groan! But before you dismiss me, please hear me out.

As someone who has lived and worked on both sides of the Kannada/English fence, I feel, from experience and with hindsight that had I been provided with a strong grounding in my mother tongue—with English as an additional tool—I would have gained the best of both worlds. Let us understand that language is not just a vehicle for communication or a tool to land a good job. Instead, it is 'life itself', because in it lies our identity, our history, our traditions, our culture, the very soul of who we as a society are. Let me give an example. One of the English rhymes sung by children studying in the English medium is 'Rain, rain, go away, come again another day, little Johnny wants to play'. Kids studying in the Kannada medium sing 'Huyyo, huyyo, maleraya, baale totakke neerilla' (which roughly translates to 'Rain, please pour and pound the earth, there is no water in our banana plantation'). The first rhyme, which is of British origin, reflects the miserable English weather which is of no consequence to us in India. The second, which is entirely local, tells us that ours is an agrarian society, that we depend on rains and that banana is grown here—all of which enhance the knowledge of our children.

Let's move to education scenarios in other countries. In China, which is the fastest growing economy today, the medium of instruction right up to the university level is the mother tongue. Today, they are offering English and other European languages to students as optional subjects because of market realities. The same is the case with Japan, Korea, France and Germany. If primary school teachers in all those countries can teach their kids science, mathematics, social studies and history in their local languages, why can't ours? No one is asking them to teach highly complicated theories or complex theorems. All they are required to teach is basic primary school stuff.

Well-known Kenyan writer—and a distinguished professor of English and comparative literature in American universities to boot—Ngugi wa Thiong'o has said, "Language is the essence of our being, the very core of our soul, the medium of our memories, the link between space and time, the basis of our dreams." Surely, we cannot afford to ignore our own languages.

Many people believe that English is an empowering tool and therefore it must be the medium of instruction. Major scientists like Prof C.N.R. Rao or Abdul Kalam did not study in English medium schools. Of the eight Kannada writers who have won the prestigious Jnanpith awards, five had a tremendous knowledge of English, its literature and its nuances. Yet, they chose to write in Kannada because it was the language flowing in their veins.

It's a tragedy that most parents today, enamored of English as they are, elect to send their children to English medium schools (just as my mother did). What they don't know is that most researches have shown that when a child is educated at the primary level in a language that it is most familiar with—meaning the mother tongue—the child imbibes knowledge better.

Even better, researches have shown that many skills acquired in the first language can be transferred to the second language. For example, if a child has developed good reading skills in Kannada, he or she will be able to apply those skills when reading English. This means that if you give children English as an additional subject they will absorb that too with much ease. So what's the problem?

I agree that English is essential today. But if we stress on it more and ignore our own tongues, we will be creating a country of rootless souls. That is why I sincerely feel that if we educate our primary school children in their own mother tongues—alongside English—they will have their feet firmly on the ground and hold the skies in their outstretched palms. Wouldn't that be wonderful!

6 April 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

Looking for 'a suitable girl'

Nataraj, a farmer in his mid thirties, is desperate. For someone who was extremely picky a few years ago, Nataraj finds nothing in front of him today to pick from. Consequently, gone is his 'too short', 'slightly dark', 'oh so plump', and most importantly, 'not of my caste' arrogance. Instead, he says: "I don't care what she looks like, or what caste she belongs to. All I ask for is that she suits my temperament." Yet, wedding bells have not rung for him.

Nataraj, a vokkaliga from Mandya, is not alone. There are countless youths like him who are finding it awfully hard to find a girl to wed. Friends who have been working with local people say that, in most villages of Mandya district, for every ten males of marriageable age, there are only two or three girls. Who's to blame for this? A scientific study regarding female foeticide and our society's preference for male heirs would establish the cause of this predicament. For now, one can only hazard a guess and say that, as our society modernizes, options before girls of marriageable age have widened. In Mandya these days, youth like Nataraj curse what has been dubbed as 'jeans pants syndrome'. Young men from villages who have found jobs in hotels or factories in Bengaluru, flaunt blue jeans and dark shades on their trips home. Village lasses fall for this, and prefer marrying them and moving to Bengaluru, which leaves farmers like Nataraj feeling like the scarecrows in their fields.

This is not a phenomenon confined to Mandya. Even in Malnad and coastal districts of Karnataka, young men of different communities are desperately seeking brides. This predicament began when education and industrialization started gaining more importance over agrarian activities. The first community to be hit hard by this change was the havyaka brahmins.

Unlike other brahmin sub-sects, havyakas are by and large farmers. Being broadminded and progressive, havyakas ensured that their children—both boys and girls—got educated. Unfortunately for them, some of their educated girls preferred to marry outside their caste and work as lawyers, doctors or engineers, instead of marrying havyaka boys and living on areca nut farms.

Two decades ago, *Adike Varte*, a newsletter for areca nut farmers, had published an article lamenting this problem facing the havyakas. Gradually, this matter spread to other brahmin communities too. Finding girls within one's sub-sect became such a huge problem that a few years ago, the heads of mathas of different brahmin subsects declared that marriage between the sub-sects was not an issue at all. Even that, however, has not solved the crisis. They have now introduced a new procedure which can roughly be dubbed as 'ghar vaasi'. Brahmin families which can't find suitable girls for their boys are opting to welcome girls from the lingayat community.

Unlike vokkaligas or kurubas, lingayats are vegetarians—like brahmins—which explains this 'openness'. Once the choice of lingayat girl is finalized, she is made to go through a 'ghar vaasi' ceremony in which the groom's maternal uncle 'adopts' the girl as his daughter—which means that her lingayat past is 'eradicated'. After this ceremony, marriage between the brahmin boy and the newly 'converted' brahmin girl is solemnized. (It is important to note that no new ceremony has been devised to accept the marriage of non-brahmin boys with brahmin girls.) On their part, lingayats have opted for 'linga deekshe'—converting the girl into lingayat dharma—before conducting marriage rituals.

To get an idea of the enormity of this problem, we can look at the case of Sirimane Nagaraj, a naxal leader who recently returned to the mainstream. More than three decades ago, when Nagaraj's sister married a Dalit boy, with the consent of the families on both sides, their family was ostracized by his community. Fearing they would not get boys to wed because of the ostracism, two girls related to him had committed suicide. Today, the same people who had ostracized Nagaraj have gladly arranged weddings with girls from outside their community.

Desperate to catch a bride, many men have cast their nets wide. Sometimes this has ended in conjugal bliss and sometimes in hilarity. One funny case concerns a man from a 'vegetarian' community. In his forties, he is well-settled with a job, a bungalow and a fancy car. But he is unhappily single. Finally, he struck a deal with a family from the 'fisherman' caste. The poor parents of the girl were thrilled that their daughter was going to marry a rich man. However, on the day things were being finalized, the hopeful groom insisted that, after marriage, the bride should stop eating non-vegetarian food. Upon hearing this, the girl threw a fit and rejected the man, his bungalow and his car.

Anyway, in the 'marriage market,' there is high 'demand' for girls these days. Unfortunately, in contrast to 'market' theories, this demand has not translated into 'value'. Girls are still looked down upon and, sometimes—like in Mandya and many other places—even dispatched to the netherworld through 'honour killings', for marrying outside the caste. All this makes one wish that, at least as far as the girls are concerned, this 'demand' will evolve into 'respect'.

18 May 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

To kill or not to kill

The State is not God. It has not the right to take away what it cannot restore when it wants to.

Anton Chekhov

George Orwell's essay "A Hanging" is a must read for anyone who is concerned about the death penalty. Set in Burma, where Orwell was posted as a police officer of British India, the essay speaks of a Hindu man who is about to be hanged. Orwell notices that the man, as he is being escorted to the gallows, steps aside slightly to avoid a puddle of rainwater. That sight makes the author wonder: "It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man. When I saw the prisoner step aside to avoid the puddle, I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide. This man was not dying, he was alive as we were alive."

Punishment for a crime is necessary in any civil society. But the death penalty, even in the rarest of rare cases, has a finality to it which is irreversible. A number of people and our judiciary justify the death sentence on the basis of: a) deterrence, b) justice, and c) vengeance or to appease a majoritarian monstrosity also known as 'satisfying the collective conscience'.

Innumerable studies across the world have shown that the death penalty has not been a deterrent to crime. For instance, in the United States of America, states which do not have the death penalty have much lower murder rates than those which send criminals to the electric chair. Back home, in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, the special judge of the Chennai TADA court had sentenced all the twenty-six conspirators and abettors (the actual killers having all died) to death by hanging on the grounds that "this will deter foreign conspirators or terrorists in future not to use Indian soil for nefarious conspiracies". I guess Ajmal Kasab and his buddies had not heard of this judge's warning. It's a joke to think that the death penalty will deter terrorists who are anyway prepared to die. So, what deterrence are we talking about?

"I believe [...] that, while all human life is sacred, there's nothing wrong with the death penalty if you can trust the legal system implicitly, and that no one but a moron would ever trust the legal system," says Neil Gaiman, the writer, in *American Gods* (2001).

Some support the death penalty on the grounds of due process of law. But studies have shown that in most cases where the court has handed down the death penalty, the accused has received very poor legal aid. We do not have to go very far back to check the veracity of this. In the case of the December 2001 attack on India's parliament, a lower court had pronounced the death sentence on both Afzal Guru and S.A.R. Geelani. Since eminent lawyer Ram Jethmalani took up Geelani's case, he was given a clean chit by the Supreme Court. However, Afzal Guru, who received very poor legal aid, got the hangman's noose. Even in countries like the United States of America, scores of people have been sentenced to death on the basis of tardy investigations or a prejudiced judiciary. The most famous case is of boxer Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter who was put on death row not once but twice. However, after twenty long years behind bars, Carter was declared innocent and released in 1985. In 2009, our Supreme Court admitted that it had erred while dealing with some death penalty cases. This being the case, can we say with a clear conscience that the law has been followed when we are snuffing the life out of a man?

In his short novel *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* (1829), Victor Hugo says, "But secondly you say 'society must exact vengeance, and society must punish'. Wrong on both counts. Vengeance comes from the individual and punishment from God."

Some people believe that it is okay for the court—and hence the state—to order a person's death. They feel that it is the right of the state to kill in the larger public good. When it is not okay for a person to kill, how is it okay for the state to kill? If we support the death penalty for homicide, then we will have to go back to medieval times and say an eye for an eye, an arm for an arm, arson for arson, destruction for destruction. Come on, let's be logical and not behave like the mullahs of the Taliban. To 'satisfy collective conscience' is not the job of the courts and there is no space in law for something as incongruous as that.

Human rights activist, the late K. Balagopal had pointed out in one of his essays that "private revenge is explicitly ruled out by modern law as an answer to crime. Even the most morally justified revenge is disallowed. Can it then be smuggled in through the back door, dressed up in black robes, speaking the language of society's moral conscience and hand out death sentences?"

We Indians like to think that these days we are becoming more globalized. Yet, we will not stand by 139 countries worldwide which have banned the death penalty. Instead, we would like to hold on to this repugnant form of justice and keep company with such countries as Iraq, Iran, North Korea, China and, of course the USA. Isn't it time we grew up?

At the time of writing this article, the fate of Yakub Memon is undecided. If he is guilty of having taken the lives of 257 people, let him live with that hell till his last breath. I, for one, certainly don't want his blood on my hands or mind.[1]

28 July 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

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[1] Two days after the appearance of this article, the morning of his fifty-third birthday, Memon was hanged.

'Yesterday Basavanna, today Kalburgi'

It happened sometime in 2003 or 2004. In a small town called Malebennur, Davanagere district, a few lingayat youths had stripped and raped two women from a minority community to gleeful chants of 'Jai Shri Ram'. Riots and looting had promptly followed. That incident disturbed me extremely since Malebennur is very close to my ancestral village from my maternal side.

Malebennur had been a place where Hindus and Muslims had lived in harmony for generations. Soon after that incident, I was invited to talk at a lingayat matha in Davanagere. Though I had avoided lingayat mathas till then, I decided to go so that I could give a piece of my mind to the local lingayats. I cited one of Basavanna's famous vachanas, which in A.K. Ramanujan's translation, goes:

> The rich will make temples for Siva.
> What shall I, a poor man, do?
> My legs are pillars,
> the body the shrine,
> the head a cupola of gold.
> Listen, O lord of the meeting rivers,
> things standing shall fall, but the moving shall ever stay.

I asked the people gathered there, "The founder of your lingayat religion, Basavanna, was against building temples and worshipping idols, why then should you have truck with forces who want to build a temple to an imaginary god?" There was a furor. I was not allowed to finish speaking. Local lingayats were so upset that I was provided police protection.

Fortunately for me, Dr M.M. Kalburgi also happened to be in Davanagere that day and was staying in the same hotel as I. He came to know about what had happened at the matha and sent for me. That was the only time I ever met him. A gentleman and scholar, he cited various shasanas (inscriptions) and vachanas explaining how lingayats were not Hindus. "What you said is correct, don't be afraid to voice your ideas," he encouraged me.

The reason for Kalburgi's brutal killing is yet to be ascertained. However, the joy of the right-wing elements upon his demise shows how speaking against majoritarian beliefs is always dangerous.

We Kannadigas would like to believe that, unlike some of our neighbors, we are extremely tolerant about different streams of ideas. Unfortunately, things here have not changed much for more than nine centuries. This was enunciated in one placard displayed at the meeting on Sunday to protest against Kalburgi's killing. It said: Yesterday Basavanna, today Kalburgi.

Basavanna, a social reformer and poet of the twelfth century, stood staunchly against the caste system. He strove for a casteless society which believed that only work was worship. He rebelled against the brahmanical caste system and identified himself with those born into 'lesser' castes. In one of his vachanas, he went so far as to declare that he was born to the servant of Madara Channaya and the tanner maid of Kakkayya.

Basavanna and other vachanakaras successfully built a strong movement which attracted people from all castes and classes. Those who came into the new social fold called Lingayata dharma forsook their previous caste identities and considered one another as equal. The real test for Basavanna, however, came in the guise of a marriage.

Two of Basavanna's staunch supporters were Haralayya, a poor cobbler, and Madhuvarasa, a rich brahmin. Haralayya and Madhuvarasa wanted to show that they really believed in Basavanna's egalitarian society, both in spirit and deed. So, they decided that Haralayya's son Sheelavanta would marry Madhuvarasa's daughter Lavanya. Of course, Basavanna gave his blessings to the new couple.

A marriage between a brahmin girl and an untouchable boy was too much for the priestly class to tolerate. They opposed the marriage and complained to Bijjala. Bijjala, who himself belonged to the barber community, could not resist the pressure of the upper castes and caved in. Punishment was swift and brutal. The bridegroom Sheelavanta's eyes were gouged out after which he, Haralayya and Madhuvarasa were tied to the legs of elephants and dragged along the roads of the town till death.

Bijjala's army also swooped down on lingayats. Thousands were killed while many fled in different directions. All they had as evidence for the casteless and classless society they had tried to establish were the vachanas composed by various people. In order to protect the vachanas, the lingayats placed them in the safekeeping of many people in different places. It was only in the twentieth century that they were collected together. Of the lakhs of vachanas composed 900 years ago, today only about twenty thousand remain. As for Basavanna, he was so dismayed at the chaos after the inter-caste wedding that he moved away to Kalyana.

Today, most lingayats have forgotten the exemplary ideals their religion was founded upon. Instead, they have become temple visitors and idol worshippers. Worse, they have become ideological slaves of the same priestly class that their Basavanna had so strongly revolted against. When a scholar like Kalburgi, who had studied both the vachana movement and the cultural history of the Kannada language, tried to tell them "this is not your religion", they called him a blasphemer and harassed him with innumerable legal cases. And when he was shot to death, they gloated, "If you mock Hinduism, you will die a dog's death." What they forget is that, just as with Kalburgi, had Basavanna not voiced his opinions so many centuries ago, the lingayats would not be in existence.

No one knows who will gain materially by Kalburgi's death. But it is clear that it is the right-wing fascist forces which will gain ideologically when reformist voices such as Basavanna's and Kalburgi's are brutally and fatally shut down. Ideas, however, never die.

31 August 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

Conscience keepers and 'manufactured crisis'

In Indian history, this is the first time that the literary world has expressed its disaffection as vociferously as in the last couple of weeks [October 2015]. The battle for freedom of expression and choice of lifestyle in order to preserve the syncretic 'idea' of India has now even drummed up international support. Naturally, all of this has put the raving lunatic right wing's khaki knickers in a knot. Not knowing how to curb the rising surge of dissatisfaction, they have started to come up with various theories. Let us take a look at their theories one by one.

This is a 'manufactured crisis' against the Centre.

This is Arun Jaitley's attempt to turn Noam Chomsky's famous concept of 'manufacturing consent' on its head. But what Jaitley has not taken into account here is that all the writers who have expressed their discontent against increasing intolerance in our society have not met, or heard, or read all of one another's writings. There has been no via media amongst them to deliberately 'manufacture' a 'crisis'. They have all responded individually and spontaneously. Fact is, it is the Sangh parivar which has perfected the art of 'manufacturing crises' like Kamandal versus Mandal, creating communal tension before every election with attacks on Christians, Muslims, dalits, women, etc, to completely divert people's attention from real issues such as poverty, joblessness, discrimination, etc.

Very few people have read these writers' works. So their protest is *meaningless and shall not sway the common man.*

Correct, a common man might ask: Who is Nayantara Sahgal? Likewise, Champa (Chandrashekar Patil who triggered the spate of returning awards by handing back the Pampa Award) and Kum. Veerabhadrappa too might not have the backing of lakhs of readers. But as Sahgal has said, "I am returning the awards to awaken the conscience of the country, to make people aware of what is going on around them, to stop this attack on our secular heritage… Even if the present regime is not listening, I am sure the people are listening. I am sure the message has gone down to them." That is precisely the point of their protests and they have been remarkably successful. Because today the common man, instead of asking 'Sahgal who?' is asking: Why was a man killed because he ate beef?

These writers are publicity hungry. They are cowards.

The protesting writers had received adequate publicity when they were conferred with prestigious awards. So, why would they hanker for more now? Besides, we are living in such times that if dissenters are lucky, they will only have their faces blackened (like Sudheendra Kulkarni, former aide to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and now chairman of a right-wing think-tank), if they are not, they will be shot dead (M.M. Kalburgi being the latest example). If the protesting writers were indeed cowards, why would they have stood up and said 'I disagree' and put their lives at the mercy of lunatic lynch mobs?

Where were these writers when Salman Rushdie's book was banned? Where were they when Taslima Nasreen was hounded out of India?

When Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was banned, leading intellectuals of the country took out a full-page advertisement in a prominent English daily to condemn the ban. As for Taslima, people like P. Lankesh felt that though she was a bad writer, she had the right to voice her opinion. Recently, in Karnataka, it was the liberals who ensured that the lifting of the ban on *Valmiki Yaaru?* (Who is Valmiki?), a book which claimed Valmiki was a brahmin by birth and not a beda (nayaka), even though its writer, K.S. Narayanacharya, is an RSS sympathizer. The Hindutva elements are trying to champion Taslima's cause only because she condemns Islamic fundamentalism. If they were sincere about protecting Taslima's and other writers' freedom of expression, why did they hound Tamil writer Perumal Murugan over his novel *Mathorubhagan* (One Part Woman)? Why did fundamentalist Hindu organizations push him towards writing his own obituary as a writer?

Most communal riots and killings have happened when the Congress has been in power. Yet, why are they targeting Modi's government?

Yes, it was when the Congress was in power that Mahatma Gandhi was killed. Yes, it was when the Congress was in power that the Babri Masjid was destroyed. Okay, that's history, so let's not bother with it now. But what accounts for the fact that over the last eighteen months communal incidents have tripled in states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—both of which are incidentally ruled by non-BJP governments? Why is it that after Narendra Modi consolidated his power in Gujarat not a single communal incident took place there? Therefore, is it not more important to see who the provocateurs of communal violence are instead of who was in power then?

The Dadri incident happened in Uttar Pradesh and Kalburgi was killed in Karnataka. What does Modi have to do with these? Dadri *was an accident and Kalburgi's death was a tragedy, that's all.*

Whether it is Dadri or Babri, the 1984 massacre of Sikhs in Delhi or the 2002 carnage of Muslims in Gujarat, or the killings of Kalburgi, Narendra Dabholkar and Govind Pansare ... none of them are mere accidents, stray incidents or the expression of popular resentment. They were all well plotted and carried out acts of crime. None of them would have been possible without the active support of the powers that be and the backing of an ideological front.

There is a political agenda behind it. Why were they silent earlier?

Most certainly they do have a political agenda. As Shovon Chowdhury has written in Scroll.in: "Accusing writers of practising politics is like accusing humans of breathing. We can't all write about half-girlfriends." Jokes apart, it is important to recognize that most writers are wedded to the politics of democracy and free speech instead of electoral parties. Earlier too, writers have made known their disagreements with the establishment.

The BJP is now rattled by the spate of protests because they know the kind of public traction the writers are gaining regardless of the popularity of their works. The root of the BJP's fear is the knowledge that despite its humongous electoral victory and Modi's 'rockstar' shows abroad, it is these writers who are effectively the conscience-keepers of the nation. Everything, I guess, has a boiling point. In the case of the protesting writers, that point was the lynching of Mohammed Akhlaq in whose house a humble fire was lit—to cook some food to eat.

19 October 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

‘We are the progeny of Ekalavya’

Huchchangi Prasad is a rebel with a socio-political cause. In his short life of twenty-three years, this young man has lived through pain, oppression, poverty, deprivation and slavery. What he has had to endure has naturally made him a very angry young man. Like most young poets of his age, Prasad vents his rage through his works. But his anger is accompanied by concern.

As noted poet Du. Saraswathi says, “Prasad’s poems are filled with fiery flames of pain, resentment and fury. But the fiery words also contain kindness and empathy.” Even a cursory reading of some of Prasad’s poems—which were published under the title *Odala kichchu* (The Blaze Within) and which won an award from the Karnataka Book Authority—will reveal that he opposes the caste system, Hindutva and blind faith. A follower of B.R. Ambedkar’s teachings, Prasad yearns for the return of someone like Ambedkar or Basavanna who will unshackle those who have been trapped in the pit of ignorance.

Born to a devadasi mother and a dalit father, Prasad was forced to spend his childhood as a bonded laborer. What saved him from a life of misery was a government scheme called ‘Chinnaraloka’, which helps rehabilitate and educate child laborers. Education rid his life of the darkness that enveloped it, and brought in awareness. As Prasad says, “I have written about what I have lived, experienced and seen. What’s wrong with that?”

Well, according to some, he did a whole lot of wrong things. In March last year, Prasad not only published a collection of his poetry, he had the nerve to invite Prof K.S. Bhagwan to release the book. The combination of 'stalwart' Bhagwan—who has for long been an annoyance to fundamentalist Hindus and currently faces death threats—and the 'upstart' Prasad proved too much for the Hindu Jagaran Vedike and Sri Ram Sena, who not only made anonymous threatening calls to Prasad, but even filed complaints with the police. No one knows what subsequently happened to the police complaints but what is known is that gradually the threat calls to Prasad stopped.

That was many moons ago. A lot of blood has been shed since, communal hatred has been spread and right wing goons have gained enough confidence to attack whoever they think is opposed to their agenda. Last week, some of them lured Prasad to a desolate place in Davanagere and physically attacked him. Not only did the attackers smear kumkum on Prasad's face, they threatened him saying, "You son of a bitch, how dare you criticize Hindu dharma? You have been born a madiga [a dalit caste] because of the sins you committed in your past life. Scoundrels like you should be killed. We will chop off your fingers, you bastard, for writing against Hindu dharma." One of the attackers even pulled out a blade to cut Prasad's hand. The fear of losing his hand emboldened Prasad to put up a stiff resistance and he escaped from his assailants with a minor injury to his palm.

"What is wrong with my criticizing Hindu religion? Even Ambedkar criticized Hindu religion. He said, 'Hindustan is a land of inequalities.' According to me, there is no religion in the world which is as ghastly as Hinduism," says Prasad in defense of his point of view. He adds, "What is this Rama Rajya that they want to establish? Have they ever pondered about what happened to shudras like Shambuka under Rama Rajya? Have they ever thought of the status accorded to women under Rama's rule? What happened in the case of Sita? We don't want their Rama Rajya. We want Praja Rajya as envisioned in our Constitution."

Pointing out that since his right palm has been injured he might not be able to write for a while, Prasad said with righteous anger: "They might be the progeny of Dronacharya. We are the progeny of Ekalavya." Which reminded me of Kuvempu's play *Beralge Koral*. As everyone knows, Drona made Ekalavya cut off his right thumb as guru dakshina in order to protect his favorite pupil Arjuna's image as the best archer. But for Ekalavya, a tribal living in the forest, hunting is essential for survival. Kuvempu's version ends with Ekalavya learning to use his left hand to shoot the arrow. When I mention this to Prasad, he says, "Is that so? I didn't know that. What I do know for sure is that they can never curb me or my spirit. Ambedkar has taught us the value of self respect, self awareness and standing up for ourselves. I shall forever follow in his path."

Well, sticks and stones may break their bones, but the ideals Ambedkar has instilled in the minds of people like Prasad can never be shattered by right-wing goons.

26 October 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

The stronger and saner voice

On 14 September 2015, thousands of writers, progressive thinkers, leftists, intellectuals and students gathered at Dharwad to condemn the brutal killing of respected scholar M.M. Kalburgi, and denounce the recent death threats to intellectuals and writers. On the same day, *The Times of India* carried a report headlined: K'taka cites no consensus, kills anti-superstition bill.

As everyone knows, in the wake of Kalburgi's murder, many people had said now was the time for the Karnataka government to bring into force the Karnataka Prevention of Superstitious Practices Bill. It must be noted here that Kalburgi was not a rationalist in the mould of Abraham Kovoor, H. Narasimhaiah or Narendra Dabholkar. Instead, he was a staunch lingayat, and the lingayat religion firmly opposes obscurantism and false notions. Yet, the coincidence of the protest and the quiet burial of the proposed bill spoke eloquently of the irony of the times we are living in.

In 2013, when the Congress came back to power in the state, chief minister Siddaramaiah and law minister T.B. Jayachandra had taken a personal interest in enforcing a law against superstitions. At their request, experts from various fields and the National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, had studied a similar bill which had been implemented in Maharashtra and prepared a draft model of the legislation. But when the draft was handed over to the government, there was hullabaloo from right wingers. The RSS and its various wings such as the Bharatiya Janata Party, Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad alleged that the bill was being brought in deliberately to hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindus. The Hindu fanatics also carried out a vicious campaign of misinformation against the bill across the state. Because of their campaign, people in rural areas started asking: "Is it true that after this bill becomes law, our women will not be allowed to wear the mangalsutra or kumkum?" Some even said, "It seems, soon we will be made to remove all the idols and pictures of gods from our houses."

Not only did the right-wingers spread falsehoods across the state, they reveled in their own ignorance. For instance, Pratap Simha Nayak, president of the Dakshina Kannada BJP unit, confessed that he had not read the draft of the bill. But that did not stop him from erroneously declaring: "The bill terms pada puja (washing the feet) of swamis and wearing rudrakshi mala (a rosary-like garland worn by sadhus) as superstitions. That is why it must be opposed." Even someone like former law minister Suresh Kumar, considered wiser than the rest of the lunatic saffron brigade, said, "The government is trying to ban religious practices by labeling them as superstitious practices. If they come out with this bill, it will definitely carry a stigma." The last nail in the coffin of progressivism was hammered into place by the state BJP president, Prahalad Joshi. While opposing the bill, Joshi made a bombastic claim: "Reforms come naturally to Hindus. There is no need for enacting laws to bring changes." Oh, yes, Mr Joshi, a blah-blah law was not needed to ban lifting of night soil; it came about naturally. And yes, Bettale Seve (nude worship) and Okali (throwing colored water on women from the 'lower' castes) were also brought to an end in the state through introspection by Hindus.

In reality, the draft of the Karnataka Prevention of

Superstitious Practices Bill, 2013, aimed at spreading scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform. Therefore, it intended to ban such practices as offering human sacrifice to appease a deity, performing exorcism or black magic, eating a human corpse (siddubhukti), claiming to possess divine powers, promoting rituals that harm human bodies, facilitating rituals which are dangerous to children, isolating menstruating women and segregating pregnant women, parading women naked or offending their dignity in any other way, and sexually exploiting women by invoking supernatural means. Anyone in his or her senses will agree that the aforementioned acts should find no place in a civilized society.

But what had irked the Hindu fanatics were two other elements in the draft bill: the banning of madé snana (people from the 'lower' as well as the 'upper' castes rolling on the leftover food and the leaf-plates of brahmins) and panktibheda (dining on the basis of caste segregation). Despite the Supreme Court frowning on madé snana, it is still being followed at Kukke Subramanya temple near Mangalore and at other places. As for panktibheda, it is religiously observed at most Hindu temples and mathas. On Ugadi day in 2014, Vanitha Shetty, a lecturer in Manipal, had visited the Krishna temple at Udupi. In order to receive the 'prasada', she had sat down to dine with some of her friends. However, brahmins supervising the hall asked about her caste. When she said she belonged to the bunt caste, she was unceremoniously thrown out. While madé snana implies the superiority of brahmins, panktibheda reinforces discrimination on the basis of castes. Had the bill been passed, pontiffs of several mathas where these two evils are practised would have been punished with a jail term.

Law minister Jayachandra has expressed helplessness in getting the anti-superstition bill passed. *The Times of India* quotes him as saying, "Those who want this bill have no voice; those who opposed it have received a lot of publicity." You are wrong, Mr Jayachandra. Please listen to the voices of the thousands of people who gathered on Monday at Dharwad. They have all insisted that this bill be passed as soon as possible. Their voice is not only stronger, it is also saner than those of Nayak, Kumar, Joshi and other elements of the regressive and anti-reformist brigade.

15 September 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

Leopard Modi and his spots

Will the mainstream media and political commentators please stop referring to the hate spewing Hindutva brigade as 'side actors' or 'fringe elements'? While they are at it, will they also please stop expecting prime minister Narendra Modi to speak up and 'redeem' an already buffed up image? These two requests are being made since almost everyone seems to separate the lunatic brigade from Modi and expect him to somehow rein in the hardliners. What they are refusing to face is that Modi is very much a product and part of the Hindutva brigade. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that it is Modi who is the script writer, director and producer of the hate drama that has been going on for the last eighteen months since the BJP government came to power at the Centre (2014).

That's going too far? Well, let's look at some examples.

Sakshi Maharaj, the BJP MP from Unnao, has gone on record to say, "The concept of four wives and forty children just won't work in India." Union minister of state Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti had told voters in Delhi that they must choose between 'Ramzadon' (those born of Rama) and 'haramzadon' (those illegitimately born). Sadhvi Prachi, a leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad who had unsuccessfully contested from the Uttar Pradesh assembly constituency of Purkazi on a BJP ticket, has claimed that "they (Muslims) are trapping our daughters through love jihad. These people who give birth to 35–40… are trying to make Hindustan into Darul

Islam." Another VHP leader Shankaracharya Vasudevanand Saraswati had suggested that "Hindu women should produce ten kids so that Hinduism does not become a minority."

Modi might be maintaining a *maun-vrat* (vow of silence) on such issues right now. But let's see what he had said about Muslims earlier. Soon after the horrifying riots of Gujarat in 2002, Modi had said the following at a rally in Mehsana district: "Why should we run relief camps for them? Relief camps are actually child-making factories. Those who keep on multiplying the population should be taught a lesson."

That notorious rabble-rouser Sakshi Maharaj had advocated death sentence for those indulging in cow slaughter. To quote Sadhvi Prachi once again, she had declared that whoever dares to eat beef deserves to be lynched like the fifty-year-old Mohammad Akhlaq of Dadri. India's culture minister Mahesh Sharma had said, "A cow reminds a Hindu of his/her mother and hence killing a cow for meat is equivalent to killing someone's mother." Union minister for agriculture and food processing Sanjeev Baliyan had said that if cow slaughter was not stopped more incidents such as Dadri would take place. An outfit floated by BJP MP Yogi Adityanath had even offered to provide guns to the Hindus of Bishada village after the Dadri incident.

Let's see Modi's stand on cow slaughter. Addressing a convention of Jain businessmen in 2012, Modi had said: "This year, the Centre has said that India is the world's largest beef exporter. Is this what we pride ourselves on? Brothers and sisters, I don't know whether this saddens you, but my heart screams out at this. I am unable to understand why you are silent, why you are taking this lying down."

Later on, in the run up to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the 'Pink revolution' was one of Modi's pet peeves. At an election rally in Bihar, Modi said, "Across the countryside, our animals are getting slaughtered. Our livestock is getting stolen from our villages and taken to Bangladesh. Across India too, there are massive slaughterhouses in operation. And that's not all. The Delhi sarkar will not give subsidies to farmers or to Yadavs keeping cows but will give out subsidies to people who slaughter cows, who slaughter animals, who are destroying our rivers of milk, as long as they set up qatlkhanas (slaughterhouses)."

The fact is that just like Mahesh Sharma, Sanjeev Baliyan and others of the saffron brigade, Modi believes that Hindus should emulate Rana Pratap who, they say, fought wars and sacrificed young men in order to protect the cow. When it comes to Sonia Gandhi, Modi is not far behind a caustic Giriraj Singh. Singh was caught on camera saying, "Had Rajiv Gandhi married a Nigerian woman instead of the fair-skinned Sonia Gandhi, the Congress party would not have accepted her as its leader." Well, Modi too was caught on record saying, "This daughter of Italy has given us an open certificate that we had insulted the land of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarder Patel... Mahatma Gandhi used to say 'Drive away these white men'. But what did Congress do? 'Oh white people, please come, be our Congress president' they said."

When the saffron goons emit their toxins, Pakistan is never far from their thoughts. In April 2014, BJP leader Giriraj Singh had said, "Modi critics should go to Pakistan." Singh was not reprimanded for making such a remark. Instead, he was rewarded with a berth in Modi's cabinet. BJP president Amit Shah said recently [29 October 2015] at a Bihar election rally that "should BJP lose these elections, crackers will be burst in Pakistan" in the misguided hope of being similarly rewarded by the electorate.

Where does Modi stand vis-à-vis critics and Pakistan? At a rally in Jammu and Kashmir in 2014, Modi had called his political rivals "agents of Pakistan and enemies of India". Can anyone make out any difference between the raving lunatic Hindutva brigade and Modi's past utterances? Aren't the Maharajs and Girirajs merely mouthing the dialogues previously uttered by their 'demi god'? Since they are all made of the same DNA, isn't it ludicrous for us to now expect one leopard to lose his spots?

9 November 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

A minister's fight against superstition

For two years since 2013, Satish Jarkiholi, minister for small scale industries in the Karnataka state government, has spent the sixth of December in a unique way. In order to observe the death anniversary of Dr B.R. Ambedkar as Anti-Superstition Day, Jarkiholi spent the day (and night) at a graveyard at Belagavi.

Although Jarkiholi is a mainstream politician who has to please the electorate in order to win at the ballot box, he has chosen to swim against the tide of blind faith. Under the aegis of Manava Bandhutva Vedike (Human Friendship Forum), an organization set up by Jarkiholi, a massive function was organized in 2014 at the Sadashivanagar graveyard. Thousands of ordinary people, hundreds of activists, several seers of lingayat mathas and leaders of other religious denominations attended the function. They all spoke about how superstitious beliefs were keeping the poor and the backward in the dark, discussed ways to fight it and partook of a community lunch even as some of the dead were either being interred or cremated.

At the end of the day, while the rest had dispersed, Jarkiholi and a handful others spent the night in an improvised tent in the graveyard. A similar program was held this year too. This is not the first time that Jarkiholi has done something publicly against blind faith. According to astrologers, no one should eat or drink anything during a lunar eclipse. People who follow such astrologers throw away all the water stored in the house, collect fresh water and cleanse the house to get rid of the evil effects of the eclipse. To prove the astrologers and their blind followers wrong, Jarkiholi organized a tea and vada pav programme during the lunar eclipse in 2014. On the supposedly inauspicious day of Mahalaya Amavase, he put up a photo of himself getting a hair cut on his Facebook page and also circulated it through WhatsApp.

An agnostic, Jarkiholi firmly believes that castes, religions and superstitions were created by the priestly class to suppress the 'lower' communities and ensure a comfortable livelihood for themselves. "There are no gods or ghosts. I want to prove this to the people. That is why I organize such programs," he says.

A firm follower of the Buddha, Basavanna and Ambedkar, Jarkiholi knows that he might incur the wrath of his electorate for going against their beliefs. "I know that as a politician, I am taking a risk by putting my hand directly into the beehive of people's faith. Well, even Buddhism was driven out of the country because it tried to bring awareness among the populace. In the twelfth century, Basavanna, who was fighting for an equal society was also forced to resign as a minister by our own people. Like them, even I don't care if I lose power. I shall continue to strive like a one-man army against superstition," declares Jarkiholi who represents Yemkanamardi constituency in the Legislative Assembly.

Jarkiholi does not look at raahu kaala, etc, while filing his nomination papers before an election. He neither visits temples nor conducts homas and havanas. Last year, in order to facilitate his young children's education, he shifted residence from his native Gokak to Belagavi. "It was after we moved into our new house that I came to know that it had been lying empty since it was built. When I checked for the reason, I came to know that people had refused to occupy the house since it was built on a graveyard. Since I do not believe in reincarnation or ghosts, the dead don't bother me, nor I them," he quips.

Of course, there was no grihapravesha (housewarming) or any other ceremonies before occupying the new abode. For a while, Jarkiholi was the owner of Samaya News Channel. Even though the channel was in financial trouble, he refused to entertain jyothishyas (astrologers) or vaastu shastra experts. "The whole point of buying that channel was to promote rationalism. Some people offered fifty lakh rupees a month for a slot to telecast mumbo-jumbo like jyothishya and vaastu shastra. I refused to cave in," says Jarkiholi who subsequently sold the channel to stem financial losses.

His fight against blind faith is over two decades old. He says: "When I got married there were no purohits to conduct the rituals. Yet, my wife and I live happily. I never waste time on worshiping gods. Neither Bill Gates nor I have ever prayed to goddess Lakshmi. Yet, he is a billionaire today while I have a turnover of rupees 600 crores. Instead of praying to Saraswati, I think it makes more sense to remember Savitribai Phule who opened the first school for girls."

"India has seen so many social reformers such as the Buddha, Basavanna, Ambedkar, Jotiba Phule, Periyar and Narayana Guru. Yet, why are so many people still poor and ignorant? Because they have forgotten the teachings of the reformers and believed the very same people who have been exploiting them for centuries. Only when we follow the ideas propagated by our social reformers will our country progress," stresses Jarkiholi.

Jarkiholi is a politician. But when it comes to taking a firm stand against superstition plus blind faith, and spending money out of his pocket to fight against such social evils, he is not a run-of-the-mill neta.

7 December 2015, *Bangalore Mirror*

A suicide and politics of caste

Even as I write this column, thousands of students across India are protesting the death of Rohith Vemula. Who was this Rohith?

Twenty-six-year-old Rohith was a bright and enthusiastic young man. Though he came from a poor family in Guntur, he was smart enough to get two Junior Research Fellowships. The posts he made on his Facebook wall show that he liked his cigarettes, enjoyed beer and loved hanging out with friends. They show that he was socially conscious too. For instance, on Ambedkar's birthday two years ago he had written, "Let us wish for a society where there is equality, compassion and love towards each other… A surrounding where we don't see any communal riots and where we can see smiling, confident faces of children despite their lineage…"

Much more recently, he had condemned the killing of M.M. Kalburgi, appreciated chief minister Siddaramaiah for saying, "I'll eat beef, who are you to ask me?"; shared quotes about Savitribai Phule on her birth anniversary, supported the beef food festival organized at the Osmania University and mourned the demise of Indian soldiers at Pathankot. Rohith was, in short, a sensitive and liberal guy who believed in equality. In one post, he describes himself as 'a pro-life Ambedkarite'. What made this pro-life young man end his own life?

Although the left wing has ruled the roost at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, in the rest of the educational institutions across the country the right wing has had a free run. While their main aim is to recruit youngsters into their communal fold, sometimes it has also led to violent deaths. For example, in 2006, Prof H.S. Sabharwal was brutally assaulted by Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) hoodlums in Bhopal. He died on the way to hospital. According to the *India Today* website, in 2009, the principal of a college in Indore suffered a heart attack after members of the ABVP mobbed her; in 2010, ABVP thugs gate-crashed the residence of Parimal Trivedi, vice chancellor (VC) of Gujarat University, and assaulted him; in 2011 at Ujjain, Prof Sunder Singh Thakur died of shock after witnessing ABVP thugs beating up his colleague. In our own state of Karnataka, in 2005, Prof V.S. Sridhara was beaten up by ABVP brutes accusing him of being a naxal sympathizer.

Of late, however, students from the Backward and Scheduled communities have started resisting the saffron brigade. Inspired by the works of social reformists such as Ambedkar, Periyar, Narayana Guru, Jotiba Phule, etc, they have launched several campaigns—which, naturally, has angered the saffron supporters. Last year, when students of the prestigious IIT Madras formed the Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle and started organizing lectures against communalism and globalization, an anonymous letter was written to the HRD minister Smriti Irani. Soon thereafter, the study circle was derecognized.

Now, it's the turn of the Open University in Hyderabad. When Yakub Memon was hanged last year, the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA), of which Rohith was an active member, had protested because they oppose the death penalty. When the screening of the documentary *Muzzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai* was forcibly stopped by ABVP at Delhi University, the ASA had condemned that too. Susheel Kumar, president of ABVP in the University, criticized the ASA protest on Facebook saying, "ASA goons are talking about hooliganism—feeling funny". Members of the ASA felt that Susheel Kumar was terming Ambedkarites as goons and accosted him and insisted on an apology. Perhaps because he was outnumbered, the ABVP leader retracted his statement.

The confrontation between the dalit liberals and the communal saffronites did not end there. Next day, Susheel Kumar alleged that the ASA members had physically assaulted him. BJP MLC Ramachandra Rao and members of the RSS and ABVP brought pressure to bear on the VC of the Open University. Secunderabad MP Bandaru Dattatreya too wrote to Smriti Irani and said since the University had become a "den of casteist, extremist and anti-national elements" action should be taken against ASA members. An inquiry committee was formed. Though the committee said that it had "found no hard evidence" to say that ASA members had assaulted Susheel Kumar, it still recommended suspending five dalit students, including Rohith.

Even in the face of his academic career coming to an end, Rohith had then commented thus on Facebook: "To my friends who tried to muffle my voice against social odds and superstitions, I would like to say one thing clearly: Dear guys, never try to extinguish a spark with cotton mattresses ... highly inflammable... My fight against the exclusive ideologies and popular superstitions will continue on the paths laid by people like Goparaju Ramachandra Rao and Narendra Dabholkar."

When ASA objected to the suspensions despite the lack of evidence, the VC had revoked the decision and agreed to form a new committee for a fresh inquiry. A couple of weeks later, the Modi government appointed Podile Apparao as the new VC of the University. No one, certainly not ASA members, knows whether Apparao formed a new committee or not. What everyone knows is that on 20 December, five members of the ASA were unceremoniously thrown out of their hostel rooms and were told not to enter other common places in the campus. They had, in effect, been turned into 'untouchables' by the University.

It's exactly this kind of ostracism that young people like Rohith have been struggling against. Though Rohith had said in an earlier post that he knew "the magnitude of the fight I have got into", it must have been exasperating to be thrown out after having fought his way up the educational ladder.

However much we would like to sweep the caste issue under the carpet, we must recognize that Rohith's death is a result of caste politics. If we don't accept that fact, many more Rohith Vemulas will keep giving up the fight for equality.

19 January 2016, *Bangalore Mirror*

'Humanism above patriotism'

The rousing speech made by Kanhaiya Kumar on the premises of the JNU on 9 February 2016 had me rooting for him. This young man has his heart and brain in the right place, I thought. Because every word that he uttered reminded me of what our country ought to be.

This morning, a month and a half later, when I saw Umar Khalid speaking his mind at the same campus, I was reminded of Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Where the mind is without fear'. The poem goes on to speak of India becoming a country where knowledge is free, where society is not broken up into fragments on the basis of caste, community, gender; where people strive for perfection and where everyone can hold their heads high. Clearly, Umar is a member of Tagore's imagined India. I think Kanhaiya and Umar are what the rest of our youth should strive to be like. Kanhaiya comes from a poor family from a tiny village. He has faced economic hardship all through his school and college days. Yet, he is brilliant enough to get admitted to JNU, which turns away thousands of aspirants from across the country every year.

Umar hails from a conservative Muslim family but has shrugged off the shackles of religion. He turned down a scholarship from an American university so that he could study the plight of adivasis in his own country. He knows that there is a threat to his life, yet he had the guts to return to campus and declare that he shall not live in fear and that he will not be silenced.

Both of them are self-confessed atheists and members of left-wing unions. Yet the ABVP, BJP MP Mahesh Giri, JNU vice chancellor Jagadeesh Kumar, Delhi police commissioner B.S. Bassi and some television anchors chose to believe a piece of morphed video in which slogans such as 'Allahu Akbar' and 'Insha Allah' were heard.

That was enough for all of them to brand these students as anti-nationals and view JNU as a breeding ground for dangerous elements. Anyone in his right mind would have paused to wonder, "What? Allahu Akbar and Insha Allah at a protest organized by commies?" Had they exercised that much patience, they would have been spared the ridicule that they are facing now.

After the charges of sedition against Kanhaiya and Umar collapsed like a house of cards leaving the BJP shame-faced, it resorted to hiding behind the national flag. The minister of human resource development, Smriti Irani, ordered all central universities to fly the tricolor on their campuses. Funnily enough, the same JNU which is accused by the saffron brigade of breeding anti-national elements has been flying the national flag for a number of years now.

But what is tragic is that this poor flag is being used to cover up lawlessness and communal activities. For instance, recently a few lawyers defied the Supreme Court and physically assaulted people on the court premises. And when they were condemned, they held aloft the tricolor and took out a protest march. The RSS, which had refused to hoist the national flag at its headquarters in Nagpur for more than fifty years, said all mosques should fly the national flag to prove the patriotism of the Muslim community. Although no temple in Hubli displays the national flag, the BJP conducted a national campaign a couple of decades ago to forcibly hoist it at the Idgah Maidan.

For people like Kanhaiya and Umar, patriotism does not lie in waving the national flag. Instead, patriotism is having concern for the marginalized, oppressed and the downtrodden, and working for their betterment. It is not shouting 'Bharat Mata ki jai' while threatening to rape the mothers and sisters of dissenters, but having respect for women. It is not forcing Hindutva on everyone, but protecting the religious, linguistic, cultural, traditional and other diversities in India. It is not toeing the RSS agenda but expressing the ideas of Gandhi, Ambedkar, Jotiba Phule, Periyar and others. In my view, Kanhaiya and Umar are the true patriots who really care for the people of this country. After all, what is patriotism if you don't care for the people that the flag represents? As the RSS-driven farce against the students of JNU continues, Bassi, who has proved that he is both a buffoon and a puppet of the powers that be, has today said that the onus of proving their innocence is on the students. Has he forgotten that according to the law in our country a man is considered innocent until he is proven guilty? Just because Bassi failed to prove that the students were anti-national, do they now have to prove that they are indeed patriotic Indians?

Let me round off with another of Tagore's quotes: "Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live."

22 February 2016, *Bangalore Mirror*

When God dies in his own country

Kerala, which projects itself as 'God's own country', has been witness to a number of deaths in the name of God. Sabarimala, which has one of the most popular temples in India, has seen not less than three recorded tragedies so far. In 1952, sixty-six pilgrims were killed when a display of fireworks turned tragic, just as it did at Puttingal on 10 April 2016. Again, in 1999, fifty-two pilgrims were killed in a stampede after witnessing the Makara Jyothi[1]. Those two tragedies did not prevent the 2011 stampede in which 106 pilgrims lost their lives.

Just as the devotees of Puttingal Devi temple believe that bursting fireworks will keep evil away, devotees of Ayyappa at Sabarimala believe that witnessing the Makara Jyothi will cleanse their souls and shower them with divine blessings. But the fact remains that the fireworks displayed at Puttingal are a show of one upmanship among leaders of various castes and political parties, and the fireworks are manufactured by an industry with an estimated annual turnover of over Rs 6,000 crores. Similarly, the 'celestial' Makara Jyothi is a fraud executed by workers of the Kerala Electricity Board and members of the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) which administers the Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala. Yet, why are blind beliefs such as the 'evil eye' and 'celestial blessings' nurtured over the years? Because it is blind belief, and not rational thinking, which helps the faith industry grow exponentially.

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[1] The man-made flame on the hill of Ponnambalamedu, which believers take as a celestial phenomenon marking the sun's transit into the zodiac constellation of Capricorn.

What about the role of the state which is bound by our Constitution to spread scientific temper instead of encouraging religious fallacy? To find an answer to that question, let us look at the economics around the Ayyappa syndrome. Every year, an estimated 2–2.5 crore pilgrims visit Sabarimala. The state exchequer collects more than 10,000 crore rupees in the form of various taxes imposed on the pilgrims. The TDB also earns more than 200 crores in terms of donations from the devout. Hotels, restaurants, shops and various other businesses also make a tidy sum during the Ayyappa season (between November and January) every year. With everyone else standing to gain and only the pilgrims standing to lose both their minds and their lives, no one is interested in promoting rational thinking. Whether it is an allegedly secular Congress-led government or an avowedly atheist Communist-led front in power in Kerala, the Ayyappa legend keeps growing. Similar phenomena can be found in other religious places too, including those belonging to the Christian and Muslim faiths.

Just as the present chief minister and Congressman Oommen Chandy has announced a judicial inquiry into the Puttingal tragedy, in 1999 the then chief minister and Communist E.K. Nayanar had ordered a judicial inquiry into the stampede at Sabarimala. What happened subsequently? Although the judicial commission headed by Justice Chandrasekhara Menon had held the state government guilty of "negligence in ensuring the safety of the pilgrims coming from different parts of the country", the Kerala government had taken no steps to safeguard the lives of pilgrims. One need not be divine to predict that even the inquiry into the Puttingal tragedy will meet with a similar fate. And when another tragedy takes place, yet another judicial commission will be set up; so the story goes on.

Let us now come to the games politicians play around people's faith. Till about four decades ago, the Ayyappa syndrome was confined to Kerala. From the early 1970s the Makara Jyothi myth started gaining a following outside the state. Inspired by the myth, 'star' devotees such as Amitabh Bachchan, Rajnikanth and Karnataka's own Dr Rajkumar and his sons propagated the 'Ayyappa Mala' tradition just as effortlessly as they peddled cars and shaving creams. Soon, Ayyappa's popularity spread even to the northern parts of the country. Rationalists in Kerala became alarmed at this phenomenon. In the 1980s, a group of rationalists conducted a study and gathered evidence to show that the Makara Jyothi was a fraud. But both the state government and the temple authorities kept mum even in the face of strong evidence. When circumstances forced them to accept the truth, they did so in 2008. That means all those years both of them knew that innocent people were risking their lives in order to see something that they believed was 'divine' and both of them found it profitable to let them continue to believe so.

In the Puttingal Devi temple case, though the local authorities had denied permission for the display of fireworks, politicians first played the 'communal' card to browbeat authorities, then they played the 'religious faith and tradition' card, and finally they resorted to the 'we care two hoots for the law' card. Why? Because all those cards will fetch them votes in the upcoming elections.

When encouraging blind faith to gain electoral victories becomes more important than people's lives, God will keep dying again and again even in his own country.

11 April 2016, *Bangalore Mirror*

The mirage of an oasis in old age

A huge vinyl-printed hoarding has been put up recently at Bommanahalli. Sponsored by a BJP corporator, the hoarding thanks union ministers Ananthakumar [Parliamentary Affairs] and Sadananda Gowda [Statistics and Program Implementation] for having 'strived' to get the centre to withdraw its controversial provident fund (PF) amendments of 10 February 2016. Oh really? One would have thought that thanks were due to the thousands of women garment factory workers who braved the lathis of brutal policemen through two months of protest to ensure that the Modi government withheld (if not withdrew) the new PF rules. Well, this is not the first time that a BJP-led central government has tried to tweak PF rules, and this is not the first time that women from the same garment industry in Bengaluru have protested. What is interesting is why successive BJP governments have had their eyes on the PF kitty.

Prior to the era of liberalization, the working classes of our country could rely upon a few perks upon retirement. Government servants used to get a tidy amount as monthly pension which was fully paid out by the state exchequer. Likewise, those working in the private sector could look forward to getting a handsome gratuity from the employer. And both of them would get their provident fund to which the employer and the employee had contributed throughout the years of service.

Gradually, when the number of retirees increased along with their longevity, the government amended its pension rules. Since 1986, both the central and state governments are hiring people only after they sign an agreement saying that they shall not receive any pension upon retirement. Similarly, the private sector has opted for signing contracts instead of employing people, in order to get around gratuity rules.

In our country, a major portion of the working population is in the unorganized sector, which does not come under any pension or savings scheme. A large section is also either self employed or is involved in casual labor where no social security net exists for old age. According to data dating back to 1997, only about 15 per cent of the entire work force in our country comes under the ambit of PF. Although some employers have acted as disgracefully as Vijay Mallya and not paid up their share of PF money, even what the employees deposit (10–12 per cent of basic salary) as their share of PF funds adds up to a substantial sum. As per estimates, the money in the PF fund at present is a whopping Rs 8,50,000 crores.

In the 1980s, America implemented a tax exempted retirement plan titled 401 (k). Under this plan, the savings of employees could be invested in the share market. Most importantly, there was no government insurance for the money saved in this scheme. Since the American government wanted to expand the market for its insurance companies, it started pressuring other governments to bring into force schemes similar to 401 (k). In the 1990s, the then BJP prime minister A.B. Vajpayee set up a high-powered committee under the chairmanship of S.A. Dave to recommend new PF measures. In 2000, Dave's committee submitted its report which, ironically enough, was titled OASIS (an acronym for Old Age Social and Income Security). In view of increasing retirees and the consequent burden on the government, the committee lamented that there would be scant resources left for 'development'. In order to overcome this, it suggested that employees be made to shell out some money from their pockets (with the government/employer not paying even a paisa) every month which would be returned to them when they reached the age of retirement. It even suggested that people should not be allowed to withdraw their PF money often. Most dangerously, the committee recommended that positions of provident fund managers should be auctioned and that these managers would decide in which mutual funds the PF money could be invested!

Clearly, these recommendations were against the interests of the employees but very much in the interests of investors who were looking for easy access to public funds. Critics had slammed OASIS as a 'mirage'. That year, even as the debate was going on around OASIS, a rumor spread in Bengaluru that garment factory workers would not be able to access their PF money until the age of forty-five. What followed was a wildcat strike by thousands of women on 24 July 2000. On that day, a number of Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation buses and police vehicles were torched and over a hundred people arrested. The spontaneous strike by women forced Vajpayee to drop OASIS. Yet, over the next two years, Vajpayee made two more attempts to prise open the PF funds to private investors.

Sure, since then various governments have been tinkering with the PF structure. But none had been as bold as the present finance minister Arun Jaitley. In his recent budget, Jaitley proposed to impose a whopping 60 per cent tax on money withdrawn from PF accounts. This would have been a kick in the guts to poor workers whose PF savings often represented their only fallback in times of medical or other crises. When the opposition parties protested, he was forced to fall quiet.

But like Kaa of *The Jungle Book*, Jaitley had his beady eyes on the PF money. Thus, he finally hissed, "An employee has to wait till the age of fifty-eight to withdraw the employers' portion of the fund."

Thousands of women of Bengaluru, most of them poor and unlettered, hit the streets once again. Their hellish work conditions, struggle to make ends meet, sweating for hours for less than minimum wages and anxiety about the future of their own hard earned money made them put up resistance of a kind rarely seen. On behalf of millions of workers across the country, these women forced Modi's government to backtrack.

No wonder, I am justifiably proud of these 'Rani Chennamas'[1] of my city.

25 April 2016, *Bangalore Mirror*

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[1] The queen of Kittur who led an armed rebellion against the English East India Company in 1824.

Learning that dissent is not sedition

It surprised none when the former Delhi Police commissioner B.S. Bassi and his BJP bosses foisted sedition charges on a bunch of JNU students on 12 February 2016. But what has shocked many people in Karnataka is that even though the Congress is in power here, the cops have recently filed false charges of sedition against some people.

In an incident that went largely unreported, two students belonging to the All India Students Federation were attacked. On 30 March, Jyothi K. and V. Chinnappa were distributing pamphlets near Tumkur University. The pamphlets criticized the RSS and the saffronization of education, supported the JNU Students Union president Kanhaiya Kumar and asked for justice for dalit scholar Rohith Vemula who took his own life earlier this year due to persecution by the authorities at the Hyderabad Central University (HCU). The contents of the pamphlets riled members of the ABVP. About eighty of them ganged up and beat the two leftists black and blue. Soon after, Jyothi and Chinnappa complained to the police about the ABVP members' assault. In turn, the ABVP falsely alleged that these two had shouted 'Pakistan Zindabad' and, for added measure, said they had also defamed Sri Shivakumara Swamy of the Siddaganga matha adjoining Tumakuru.

Immediately, home minister Parameshwar was apprised of the incident. Everyone had hoped that the Congress government would round up the ABVP goons in order to send a message to the saffron elements that their goondagiri would not be tolerated. What happened was quite the opposite. The local police slapped sedition charges against Jyothi and Chinnappa and filed FIRs against only four ABVP members. When asked about the basis of the sedition charges, the police replied that there was pressure from local BJP leaders to do so. The answer from the police of his own district left Parameshwar flabbergasted.

Something similar unfolded in Shivamogga district two weeks later. On B.R. Ambedkar's 125th birth anniversary, Professor Mallikarjun Meti, a respected linguist, was invited to participate in a program held at Sagar town. Addressing the gathering, Meti asked, "Even after seventy years of democratic rule, Ambedkar's dreams have not been realized. When we have not been able to achieve social justice, when the lives of the downtrodden are worsening day by day, what is the use of shouting Bharat Mata Ki Jai?" That was enough for the right wingers to create a ruckus and disturb the program. They accused Meti of being an anti-national and of having insulted the country. Later, some self-proclaimed leaders of the BJP and other Hindutva outfits held protests for three days at both Sagar and Shivamogga demanding that Meti be charged with sedition. "If you don't charge him under sedition, we will take care of him ourselves," they threatened. In the face of such pressure from 'desh bhakts', what did the police do? Instead of going through the speech made by Meti and telling the Hindutva goons to get lost, they succumbed to their pressure and sought the advice of their legal department. Upon hearing of these developments chief minister Siddaramaiah did nothing but wring his hands in despair.

A few days after that, on 11 April, a Kannada street play titled *Acche din yelli?* (Where are the good days?) was being enacted in the open space next to Ravindra Kalakshetra in

Bengaluru. Written and directed by Shashikanth Yadahalli, *Acche din yelli?* spoke about the promises not kept by Narendra Modi and of his various other electoral jumlas. Immediately, a few among the onlookers shouted, "Stop this nonsense play of yours," and tried to halt the play. The largely left-wing audience ensured that they were escorted off the premises. But that did not stop them. After the show was over, they came back and warned Yadahalli: "Don't you dare stage this play again. Or else..." Of course, the police were nowhere around to ensure that law and order prevailed. Even though the BJP is no longer in power in the state, the writ of its various Hindutva outfits still rules. That's why they are still screaming down or beating up ideological opponents and getting away with it.

The three incidents mentioned above and the state's response to them have naturally disturbed the leading intellectuals and activists of the state. In their open letter to the state government, the more than forty signatories said, "We condemn cultural terrorism which has been increasing of late ... trying to force intellectuals into silence through violence is nothing but a ruse to continue the status quo in an unequal and unfair society." While urging the government to take action against those who were trying to forcibly still the voices of progressive people, the signatories (which included freedom fighter H.S. Doreswamy, senior critic K. Marulasiddappa and retired judge A.J. Sadashiva) concluded the letter by saying, "Since we strongly believe that dissent, discussion and criticism will strengthen democracy, we request all thinkers to fearlessly continue their appraisal and critical analyses of society." Their call to keep the good fight going will definitely not go in vain in the land of Basavanna, Shishunala Sharief and Kuvempu.

Still, will the Congress government wake up and instruct the police that dissent does not amount to sedition?

2 May

Religion, politics and the naked truth

Much is being made out of Jain Muni Tarun Sagar addressing the Haryana legislative assembly in the nude, on 26 August 2016. I strongly feel that people should not make irreverent and irrelevant comments about his state of undress. He is following the rules of his religion, which is a constitutional right that he enjoys. I do, however, have disagreements on two grounds: one, the content of Muni Tarun Sagar's speech; two, how religion is being placed over and above the Constitution.

In his 'Kadve Pravachan' (harsh discourse), the 'formula' offered by Muni Tarun Sagar to curb female foeticide and his stand against gender discrimination were laudable. But the reason he gives for the need to eliminate female foeticide stinks of patriarchal hegemony. With all due respect, Muniji, rapes do not happen because of disproportionate male–female ratio. The roots of that heinous crime lie elsewhere.

Muni Tarun Sagar also said: "The control of dharma over politics is essential. Dharma is the husband, politics is the wife. It is the duty of every husband to protect his wife. It is the duty of every wife to accept the discipline of her husband. If there is no control of dharma over politics, it will be like an elephant out of control." This, Muniji, unfortunately smacks of the same gender discrimination which you yourself said makes you feel like "we are living in the fourteenth century".

It is reported that the chair for Muniji was placed higher than those of the chief minister and speaker of the Haryana assembly. Even the seat placed for the governor was lower than his. While this reflects Muniji's opinion that the 'husband' dharma should control the 'wife' politics, it also shows that Haryana politicians—cutting across party lines—also think that religion should prevail over our secular Constitution.

There is no point in blaming the BJP which is in power in Haryana for the disrespect shown towards the Constitution. This mindset has been the bane of our country since its birth sixty-nine years ago.

As everyone knows, in 1951, the year after Rajendra Prasad was chosen as the president of India, he reverentially washed the feet of 201 brahmins in Banaras and drank the water. By doing so, the first head of state of India demonstrated that he thought that the Constitution ranked lower than the status of brahmins.

What many people don't know is that a well-known Sanskrit scholar and Kannada writer who had penned the novel *Maha Brahmana* (based on the life of sage Vishwamitra) was also present at Banaras that day. When he came to know that he too was to be honored thus, he chose not to debase the president of the republic and opted out. He was none other than Devudu Narasimha Sastri. But Devudu's protest did not bother the organizers who coolly replaced him with a local brahmin.

When the fiery socialist Ram Manohar Lohia came to know of the incident, he said of Devudu, "I appreciate the stand taken by this poor Sanskrit teacher." Additionally, in an essay on caste and gender discrimination, Lohia wrote: "The president of the Indian republic publicly bathed the feet of two hundred brahmins in the holy city of Banaras. To bathe others' feet publicly is vulgar."

B.R. Ambedkar, who sought the annihilation of caste, was also critical of Rajendra Prasad, which is why he said, "Indians today are governed by two different ideologies: their political ideal set in the preamble of the constitution affirms a life of liberty, equality and fraternity. Their social ideal embodied in their religion, denies them."

Such trenchant criticism did not deter Rajendra Prasad. A year after that, he and home minister Vallabhai Patel, took part in a program to inaugurate the refurbishment of the Somnath temple. The money allotted by Saurashtra for the refurbishment of the temple was 25 lakh rupees—a handsome sum in those days. Remember, a newly independent India was struggling to stand on its feet at that time.

What about the 'staunchly secular' Jawaharlal Nehru? Indrajit Roy, a research fellow at the University of Oxford had this to say about Nehru in an article: "The darling of the self-styled progressive elite, England-educated Jawaharlal Nehru did not so much as blush when the honorific of 'Pandit', a title used by religious scholars, was conferred upon him. In *The Discovery of India*, he can scarcely conceal his admiration for what he called 'the record of public service and personal sacrifice for the public good' (page 87) of the brahmin caste. Independent India made its 'tryst with destiny' under his watch to the blaring of conch shells, a replay of Hindu rituals attending to the anointment of kings by priests in an earlier era."

Our secular Constitution strictly separates religion from politics. But, in practice, religion plays a central role in all acts political. What else explains the search for an 'auspicious time' before starting a legislative session, observing blind directions while laying the foundation stone for a government building, launching ships by breaking coconuts, offering 'baagina' to the reservoirs of dams, playing religious hymns in the background when government programs are being launched, etc. Even our courts, which are expected to abide by the Constitution and not have any ties with religion, invariably have a temple on their premises. All of which makes one wonder when the political 'wife' will successfully break the shackles imposed by dharmic 'husband' and convert India into a truly secular state.

29 August 2016, *Bangalore Mirror*

Karnataka's history of attacks on the press

Karnataka legislators have long had a penchant for hauling up journalists for allegedly breaching their precious 'parliamentary privileges'. The latest to be targeted are Ravi Belagere, and Anil Raju, the editors of two local tabloids. Speaker of the legislative assembly and head of the house privileges committee, K.B. Koliwad, has sentenced both of them to one year in jail and imposed a fine of Rs 10,000 on each, for having published allegedly defamatory articles about legislators—Congress MLA B.M. Nagaraj, the Bharatiya Janata Party's S.R. Vishwanath, and the mighty Koliwad himself—thus breaching their 'holier than thou' privilege.

The point here is not what the two editors published in their journals because, as legal luminaries have pointed out, what they published amounts to defamation and not breach of privilege. The issue here is the colonial legacy of 'parliamentary privileges' enjoyed by elected representatives. This archaic law which allows lawmakers to become judges and sentence journalists to imprisonment should not even exist in a democracy.

Till 1980, journalism in Karnataka was a staid and somber affair. Even criticism of the ruling elite used to be couched in sanitized conservative language. But then along came *Lankesh Patrike* with its language of total irreverence and attitude of calling a spade a spade. Regaling his readers, P. Lankesh, the editor, dubbed the then chief minister R. Gundu Rao as 'Gum' and senior minister S. Bangarappa as 'Bum'.

Around the same time, in the 1980s, farmers across the state were up in arms; the dalit movement was gaining ground as was the Gokak movement (which sought primacy for Kannada in state-run schools). There was a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction against the Congress government. The *Patrike* became the voice of all these issues. Strident attacks by the *Patrike* angered Rao so much that in 1981 he declared at a public function: "All journalists should be thrown into the Arabian Sea."

It was Rao's successor, Ramakrishna Hegde, who really tried to throttle the freedom of the press in the name of legislators' privileges. While he was portrayed as the 'original Mr Clean', 'PM in the making' etc, by the mainstream media, it was once again the *Patrike* that brought out the Revajeetu housing scam (1988), Non Resident Indians Housing Association land scam (1989) and irregularities in allotting arrack bottling contracts under his watch (1984).

Under the guise of codifying the freedom of the press, Hegde tried to sneak in the Karnataka Legislature (Powers, Privileges and Immunities) Bill, 1988. However, since the bill allowed for excessive punishment to journalists there was a public outcry. A couple of months later, Hegde was forced to resign following charges of telephone tapping by his government. His successor S.R. Bommai gave the bill a quiet burial.

But such was not the case with yet another Janata Party chief minister, J.H. Patel. In one of its cover stories in 1997, the *Patrike* had criticized women legislators for not performing their duties. (Certainly, the article was not in good taste.) Women legislators cutting across party lines shed copious tears on the floor of the assembly and demanded an explanation from Lankesh.

Chief minister Patel, other ministers and legislators who had borne the brunt of the *Patrike*'s criticism, came out in support of the privilege notice.

The sole exception was independent MLA Vatal Nagaraj, who had physically assaulted Lankesh in 1980 for publishing an article against him. Nagaraj now argued that while the article might be considered defamatory it did not attract action under legislators' privileges. Although the issue created a storm in the assembly for a couple of days, the then speaker Ramesh Kumar waited for it to subside and subsequently let the matter die a silent death.

It was not just Lankesh and his publication that were attacked by legislators. Even eminent journalists like T.J.S. George were targets of abuse from the floor of the house. Over the years since, editors of prominent dailies and weeklies—including this writer—have been regularly summoned before the Privileges Committee. The committee seems to be of the firm opinion that referring to legislators in the singular, criticizing their actions outside the house, or exposing their abuse of power is beyond the purview of journalists merely because they happen to be 'elected representatives' and hence more equal than others. Most complaints are settled with a reprimand or publication of an apology (however insincere), but the creeping trend of bullying the press is unmistakable.

In 2012, when Jagadish Shettar of the BJP was chief minister, two MLAs ensured that an editor was made to apologize to the legislative assembly. Abhay Patil of the BJP and Shyam B. Ghatage of the Congress alleged that *Tarun Bharat*, a Marathi daily published from Belagavi, had published 'baseless' reports against them. The then speaker K.G. Bopaiah had referred their complaints to the Privileges Committee which found Kiran Thakur, editor of *Tarun Bharat*, guilty. Thakur was made to stand in a specially erected makeshift dock in the assembly, and say "I am sorry. My newspaper has never published any material to undermine the dignity and supremacy of this house". Even though a colleague underwent such public humiliation, strangely, the media fraternity in Karnataka was silent.

With the number of 24x7 Kannada news channels increasing, things are becoming murkier. Needless to say, there is no dearth of local clones of Arnab Goswami. They are just as aggressive in shouting down participants with a different point of view from their own, even more patriotic than the self-proclaimed nationalist himself, and prone to exaggeration while 'breaking news' every minute of the day.

In March this year, several Congress, BJP and Janata Dal (Secular) MLAs joined hands to condemn TV channels for 'projecting them in poor light', 'twisting facts' and 'reporting false news'. BJP MLA Suresh Gowda, who was caught on a CCTV camera assaulting a worker at a toll booth, complained on the floor of the house that he was termed 'rowdy Suresh Gowda' by a TV channel. "They use words like goonda and rowdy casually. They even use it against public representatives," he said.

Finally, Koliwad announced that a house committee, consisting of MLAs from all parties, would be set up to frame rules and regulations for the media. This naturally evoked sharp criticism from the media fraternity. Funnily enough, while several BJP MLAs had insisted on forming guidelines for the media, they later refused to be part of the Committee saying they did not believe in curbing the freedom of the press. In the face of severe opposition, this committee now seems to have slid into sleep mode.

The issue is back again, thanks to the sentencing of Belagere and Raju. Belagere's style of journalism is certainly not to everyone's liking. No one seems to know much about

Raju or his paper, *Yelahanka Voice*. Yet, what is important is that legislators have no business to sit in judgment on journalists. It is high time they were stripped of their special privileges. If they feel they have been defamed, let them, like other ordinary citizens, take recourse to legal remedy under different sections of the Criminal Procedure Code. Constitutionally, that would be the right thing to do, instead of sentencing critics via an archaic law.

16 June 2017, *The Wire*

On Gauri

My daughter

Indira Lankesh

I delivered the baby at 6.55 a.m. on 29 January.[1] It was a girl and she weighed nine pounds. I thought I had never before seen a child as beautiful as her. All the pain I had suffered disappeared from my memory the minute I saw her face. I was shifted to a special ward which was free of charge because Lankesh worked in a government college then. When he came to see her, my grandmother, Chennammajji wrapped the child tight in a cloth and handed her to him. He sat there looking at her for long. I can never forget the joy that I saw in his eyes that day.

He brought frocks, jubbas and other clothes from a shop and wanted them put on the child. "We can't put new clothes on a newborn. It has to be old clothes worn by another child," said Chennamma. But he wouldn't listen to all that. "Do put these on. I want to see my daughter in these," he pressed. Left with no choice, Chennammajji put the new clothes first on a cow which was wandering on the hospital premises and then on my daughter.

I was in the hospital for a week. Lankesh would come every morning and evening and sit there with his daughter on his lap, gazing at her.

We named her Gauri. That was my mother's name. I returned to our home in Shivamogga after two-and-a-half months… Lankesh had bought a new, green cradle and readied it for his daughter, complete with a bed and a pillow. All my children passed through the same cradle.

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[1] From *Hulimaavu mattu Naanu* (A sour mango and I), Indira Lankesh, Lankesh Prakashana, 2013.

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One day, Gauri had eaten pani puri near South End Circle on her way home. That night she had a very high fever. Her body burnt like embers. She began to talk gibberish and we could not understand anything of what she was saying. We realized it was no ordinary fever and took her to one Pandu Nursing Home around 11 at night.

Gauri was unconscious by then. She would wake up every now and then and talk gibberish. "You have not raised your daughter the right way. I will check her later," said the doctor and left. He didn't come back even as it neared midnight. When we asked the nurses, they said the doctor would be back only the next morning.

Lankesh was furious. He picked up Gauri and got ready to leave. "You cannot take the patient without the doctor's permission," said the nurse, trying to stop him. "I will break every glass in your hospital. Here is our child suffering with high fever and your doctor says we have not raised our daughter right. I will deal with you later," he said.

We took Gauri in an auto to Martha's Hospital. It was raining heavily. By then Lankesh had called Marulasiddappa and he too arrived. Gauging her condition, the doctors there immediately admitted her.

Gauri was diagnosed with brain fever and they started her treatment. The doctors said they would need to take a sample of her spinal fluid. Gauri had no consciousness of where she was or what was happening to her, but she kept screaming, kept trying to escape from whoever tried to hold her. It was only after four people held her tight that they could extract the spinal fluid with a syringe.

After a thorough examination the doctors said, "Your daughter needs to gain consciousness within forty-two hours. If not we cannot guarantee her survival. Even if she does survive, she might be blind for life." We were both shell-shocked. My daughter's eyes are as beautiful as her father's. I used to boast that Hema Malini's eyes were no match for my daughter's.

The difficult days had begun. My mind had gone blank. I sat there staring at her. I would look at the watch every five minutes and hope she regained consciousness soon. Gauri lay there unconscious, without any sign of movement. About thirty-six hours later there was some movement in her limbs but her eyes remained shut. It was thirty-eight hours after she lost consciousness that she finally opened her eyes.

The life that seemed to have left my body returned. She could see. But she was extremely weak in the limbs and could not even stand. She fell down every time we tried to prop her up. She was kept in the ICU for a few days.

Those days Lankesh's student Hariharapriya used to drop by at our house regularly. We took turns to sit with Gauri at the hospital.

They shifted Gauri to the ward after a few days, but it took a long time for her to recover. She would certainly not have survived if we had not taken her to Martha's that day.

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When Gauri was in Pre-University College my friend Rani told me that she was going around with some boy. The boy who was senior to Gauri by two years in college was Chidanand

Rajghatta (Chidu). Gauri had introduced me to him once when he had come to Ganesh Bakery in Gandhi Bazaar. He was tall, dark and lean. I was surprised how my daughter, who was dainty like a peacock, could like a boy who looked like a crow pheasant.

What's more, they were still so young, both at an age when they should be studying hard. I told Lankesh about him. "Call the boy home, I will talk to him," he said. When he came home, Lankesh advised him that education ought to take priority at this point in his life. He listened quietly and left. Gauri promised to pay attention to her studies and not meet him any more. I went quiet after that. A year later she was caught by the same Rani when she bunked classes and went to watch a film with Chidu.

Meanwhile, there were two marriage proposals for Gauri from doctors. Both families were known to us. One of them in fact came home without any warning. Gauri locked herself up in her room and never came out. A few days later she went to a beauty parlor and cut her waist-length hair into a bob. Her logic was that the boy's family, who were conservative, would not want a girl with short hair. And she was right. My brother Shivu, who was shocked by her new avatar, gave her two slaps. She just kept silent.

The other doctor had won a gold medal. He too came with his father once to our house. Gauri was so furious that she sat in front of them in the same old clothes she wore at home.

The boy was short and had a small paunch. He wrote two letters after going back asking what the girl had decided.

"I don't want to get married. I want to study," Gauri said stubbornly. Lankesh was then busy shooting for his film *Ellindalo Bandavaru* and did not bother much about all this. He just wrote her a letter from the shooting location advising her to conduct herself in a way that wouldn't hurt her mother.

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We were still in our Gandhi Bazar house when Gauri finished her Pre-University course at National College and joined up for BA Honors in Journalism, just then started at Bangalore University. By now Chidanand Rajghatta had completed his degree and joined a postgraduate course. Their friendship had continued. Convinced that Gauri and Chidu couldn't do without each other, I had decided to keep quiet. Chidu was close to my husband. Lankesh, Ajith and Chidu spent days in front of the black-and-white television when there was a tennis or a cricket test match.

Gauri went alone to Delhi for her post-graduation in journalism at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication. It was the first time that a child from our home was going so far away, all alone. I was naturally in tears as we saw her off to her train at the Bengaluru station. Lankesh was also anxious. He who wouldn't worry much about her when she was at home, started paying close attention to the weather in Delhi while watching the news. He didn't want her to suffer the bitter cold or the severe heat of Delhi.

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Returning to Bengaluru a year later after finishing her course in Delhi, Gauri joined *The Times of India* as a reporter. By then Chidu had also started earning a good name. "Enough of you two going around like this. You get married or stop being seen together," I insisted. Now that my daughter had finished studying, I was confident she could manage and stand on her own feet.

One day when Lankesh had taken us all out to a restaurant on M.G. Road, Gauri declared, "Chidu and I are getting married next month. We have registered our names at the registrar's office." "What sort of a marriage is that?!" I asked. But Lankesh appeared very happy that she had decided to marry in a simple manner without any rituals. He beamed with pride when she said, "My marriage will cost fifteen rupees and fifty paise." He too believed in such simple weddings and encouraged them.

After returning from office one day Gauri informed us, "We are getting married tomorrow morning at 11." Since her father was not yet home, she informed him over the phone.

Next morning, after opening my sari shop I asked Shantha to take over and left with Lankesh for the registrar's office. Chidu and Gauri were already there. Soon after, his father Dr Rajanna and mother Uma also arrived. Neither of them was for this civil marriage. They were particularly anxious because Chidu, unlike our daughter, had not informed them earlier and had broken the news only that morning.

After we came out of the registrar's office, his mother Uma said firmly, "What sort of a marriage is this?! We have to have a traditional wedding and invite our relatives and friends." Gauri would not agree. "The boy's parents get the girl's parents to spend a lot in the name of tradition. I don't want all that. My Appa and Amma have educated me, that is enough," she said. Lankesh was standing there quietly smoking.

I tried to pacify her. "Let us have a simple ceremony at our house and invite 20–25 people from both sides." Lankesh too agreed because it sounded simple enough. Gauri had no choice now.

About four or five days after that we arranged a small function at home. I finished all the preparations in a hurry. Appayya, Shivu and Vimala came from Shivamogga. Lankesh's brother Shivarudrappa and his children also came. About fifty people came from Chidu's side. But Chidu and Gauri invited none of their friends and continued their rebellion against a traditional wedding! My brother Shivu performed the dhare ritual of giving away the girl in marriage.

Lankesh watched it all from his study as the marriage rites went on in our dining hall. Someone called out to him, "Come, put akshate on the couple's head and bless them." He said, "No need for any of that. My blessings are always with my daughter anyway," he said. But when everyone insisted he did come downstairs and bless the couple.

Translated by Bageshree S.

A wild flower

Rahamat Tarikere

Ardent readers such as I of P. Lankesh's literary and journalistic works knew nothing about his children. I first heard of Gauri after her father died and she took over as editor of the weekly. One day I got a letter from *Lankesh Patrike* inviting me to review a book. The letter was in English. I agreed to write even though it had a line that said, "We have chosen you."

But my relationship with the magazine was to break even before it began. The reason was an incident related to writer Bhanu Mushtaq. Some fundamentalists of the Muslim community had threatened to boycott her for advocating the right of women to pray in a mosque. A reporter from *Lankesh Patrike* solicited my response on the issue. I refused to respond immediately without knowing the full context of the controversy. Bhanu, like me, is a writer. She and I, with others like Ramzan Darga, Sara Aboobaker and Fakir Muhammed Katpadi, had formed the Muslim Progressive Writers Forum during the Shah Bano controversy. I wanted to react only after discussing the issue with her. Gauri, who expected an instant condemnation from me, did not like my hesitation. An article describing me as a fundamentalist was published in the weekly.

Later Gauri started her own weekly. By then the protests over the attempts by the Hindu right to take over the Bababudangiri shrine had begun. We had several opportunities to be together in jathas, fact-finding teams, programmes and in jail too. I saw from up close her simplicity, humaneness and commitment to social causes, alongside her blunt, rash and obstinate nature. From then on a series of political and communal phenomena shaped her thinking, writing and activism. Gauri kept on transforming. This process of transformation holds a historical significance.

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Gauri, who studied in English medium schools in Bengaluru, worked in the English media and stayed for long in Delhi, did not have intimate links with Karnataka. She did not even write in Kannada. After becoming editor of the weekly, she began to reprint some of her father's old articles. People used to make fun of her saying that the children who had never read their father's writing were now reprinting it for themselves. But Gauri started learning to respond to local issues, think in Kannada and write in Kannada. She acquired a lucid language that could communicate her thoughts and feelings straight to an unpretentious reader. Her journalistic writings show her evolution as a political thinker.

Like her father, Gauri was not a good public speaker. Her words came out in broken Kannada and her speeches barely lasted five or six minutes. I recall one particular anti-communalism program organized in Davanagere. She started her speech as if she was taking the people to task. This angered some of the people gathered there and they started to heckle and jeer. She had to cut her speech short. Lankesh had also criticized people. But his criticism had a quality that could correct someone with a touch of maturity and wisdom. Consider his article "Lives are sacred, bricks are not" that was published at the height of communal strife in India. It not only condemns those who vociferously argue for temple construction [at Ayodhya] but also has the wisdom to convince us that the lives, everyday struggles and relationships of ordinary people around us are more important than any temple. It is intense enough to touch not only innocent people who join hands with communal politics without understanding its deep conspiracies, but also, if briefly, those who are consciously part of it. If Gauri had written that article, it would perhaps have been titled, "Down with those who call bricks sacred!" She was by nature someone who challenged her enemies to battle. A person of modern mindset and western sensibility, she condemned upfront anything she felt was evil.

I did not like the way she criticized the Hindu faith when she criticized Hindutva politics. In response to my objections she would tell me this was the only language the Hindutva brigade understood. For instance, I was of the view that we should not give undeserved publicity to a bad and vicious novel like Bhyrappa's *Aavarana* by criticizing it.[1] But she would not agree and published a book by getting us all to write articles about it. She always faced her ideological enemy as if in pitched battle. She was adamant and could shun popularity and fight all alone in pursuit of that dream. Let alone her opponents, even some of her associates failed to understand this.

Gauri had an uncritical admiration for Lankesh. Once when I criticized him in a public function I learnt later that she had not liked it. She always kept the chair he sat on next to her, unoccupied. I used to tease her that it was like Bharata ruling the kingdom with Rama's footwear on the throne. Gauri, who aspired to be Lankesh's intellectual heir, always knew that her path was different. Gauri cannot be compared with her father on the point of literary achievements. But she had far greater ideological clarity in her social commitments and political struggles. Lankesh could declare that 'good people' in the BJP deserve to win elections. When Gopalakrishna Adiga became a candidate for Jan Sangh, U.R. Ananthamurthy opposed it but Lankesh went to campaign for him. Gauri never stumbled like this. The reason for this was the impact of left politics on her and the fact that she stepped into journalism and activism at a time when India's right-wing politics was acquiring a fascist character.

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[1] *'Aavarana' Yemba Vi-Kriti* (A perverse work called 'Aavarana'), Lankesh Publications, 2007.

In a country as complex and diverse as ours, where people's religious faith is mixed with cultural practices and communalism, it is easy for those who use religion as a political weapon to project themselves as guardians of religion, to co-opt a community through emotional manipulation and villainize their ideological opponents as anti-religious. Intellectual struggles against them walk a razor's edge. They face the challenge of acquiring a vocabulary that, at once, disarms their opponents and gains the confidence of the religious. They need the sensitivity to separate religion from religious perversions.

Gauri played an important role in the agitation against the Sangh parivar who had declared that they would turn Bababudangiri into the 'Ayodhya of the South.'

But in later days, she started building links between her zealous opposition to communalism and her concern for dalits, women, poor Muslims, tribals and other oppressed people. After Modi became the prime minister it was important for her to look for alternatives that could bring leftist and Ambedkarite ideologies together to challenge the rise of fascism in India. She was slowly acquiring the maturity to combine resistance and love. Gauri, who had no companion and children, sought companionship among her friends in political movements. She looked upon young girls and boys involved in the movement as her own children. She felt happy buying clothes for them and feeding them. Their company infused her with a new energy. She built a wide network with thousands of young men and women who dream of building a new society. A picture that shows her leaning on the shoulder of Jignesh Mewani, who is wearing a blue shirt she bought him, is symbolic.

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An obstinate fighter, Gauri had over the last few years been maturing into a person who could patiently work to build public opinion. Those injected with the poison of communalism often trolled her in the most despicable language. She treated them as children who have gone astray and often engaged them in discussions online till late at night. She did not blindly oppose everything about her ideological or political adversaries. When someone mocked Modi's poor English, she said that English was an instrument of power and discrimination in a country colonized by the British and it is therefore wrong to use it to mock one's ideological adversary. Gauri, who had strongly criticized the disease-ridden mindset behind Bhyrappa's novels, *Aavarana* and *Kavalu*, also made it a point to explain to everyone wherever she went why his *Uttara Kaanda* was a good novel.

Gauri always carried an old picture of mine with all my articles. I had objected to it. "I am much better looking than how I look in that picture. Use a better one!" I said. She changed the picture. Every time an article of mine was published, she called me and teased, "Tarikere, I have used a picture in which you look better than you are!" Once I was invited to inaugurate the annual event she held to mark her father's birthday. That was one of the biggest awards I have received. I had to inaugurate the event by showering flowers on his photograph.

I was hesitant. I had earlier translated the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* and Lankesh had thrashed me thoroughly in a review of the book. "You will have to protect me if Lankesh decides to come out of the photograph to thrash me again!" I had told Gauri in theatrical fashion. "Don't worry, Appa won't remember such little things. Take courage and do come!" she said. Gauri, who was neck deep in political struggles, never lost the ability to laugh and make people laugh. If I invited her home for lunch when she came to Hampi, she always warned me, "I am coming to a Muslim's house. Don't you dare give me only sweets… Biryani, biryani!"

The weekly that gave her an identity was also her millstone. Demonetization brought about a decline in its circulation. She was struggling to pay her workers every month. Overwork and financial stress was taking a toll on her body. She once called a meeting of all her close friends to share news of the distress the weekly was in. I could not make it to the meeting. A week later, I received the draft of a letter she wanted to send out to all close friends of the weekly like G. Rajashekhar and Phaniraj with a plea for financial help. I received the news of her killing soon afterwards.

In the Shaiva Purana, Gauri is Daksha's daughter. Her name means 'the fair-complexioned one'. She chooses to marry the dark complexioned Shiva. Daksha does not approve of the match. Gauri jumps into the yajna fire in protest against the insult to her husband. Reborn as Parvati, she does intense penance and wins over Shiva. But our Gauri added her father's name to her own and tried to follow his trail. Like the mythical Gauri she also went through a transformation.

There is a wild flower with petals like tongues of flame, called *Gauri hoovu* in Kannada. Our Gauri could be as severe as fire but strongly believed that no revolution was possible with firearms. It is ironic that a firearm claimed her life. What is distressing is not just the cruelty of the paid assassins, but the fact that a young generation that wants to build a new India firmly believes that those with contrarian ideological views can be abused at will, attacked and even killed. What kind of society do those filling such venom into young minds want to build? What is the antidote for this? These are the questions that Gauri's killing has posed before us. The responses that came after the killing also offer an answer to this question. The only way forward is the coming together of like-minded people.

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I have seen a video in which Gauri, who was short, is seen bending and patiently adjusting the mike to her height at a public function. It appeared to symbolize her efforts to adjust herself and address the complex situation in Karnataka. Gauri was killed before this transformation process could be completed or her transformed self become the rallying point for change in Karnataka.

There is a line in an article she wrote about her father's funeral. "The question of how a person is sent off from this world is as important as how a person lived his life in this world." Karnataka's send-off for Gauri seems to have widened the influence of her personality, ideology and aspirations.

Translated by Bageshree S.

Akka's metamorphosis

K. Phaniraj

Gauri was as much a personal friend as she was a dear comrade in the movements we plunged into. We would not have forged a warm personal friendship if we hadn't shared common social concerns and consequent sojourns in public movements. Our warm friendship would have endured even if we had disagreed over our approach to social movements: we shared broader sensibilities. She sought to build human relations where caste, religion, gender, language, nationality and strict ideology did not matter. Gauri's experiment, lasting over a decade and a half of her life in Karnataka remains unfinished.

Since she was a few months elder to me, I used to address her as 'akka' (elder sister) in both private and public. She used to address me as 'tamma' (younger brother) in private, and 'sahodara' (one born from the same womb) in public. Once I raised this with her. She said that tamma carries the warmth of private communication, while sahodara connotes a declaration of kinship. "This finesse an 'orata' (a rough-mannered person) like you won't understand!"

There were marked differences in our personalities: she felt at home in Bangalore which was a nightmare for a small-town sort like me; her English was strong and had a 'convent school' accent, while I could barely speak two sentences in English; she had lived in different parts of the world and I had literally not stepped out of Karnataka; she was quite unconnected to any of the leftist movements that I had spent something over two decades of my life with.

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The year 2000 was a turning point in the socio-cultural life of Karnataka. Apart from the change in the state's economic priorities—now bitten by the bug of IT-BT—the forces of Hindutva politics were gaining a hold on the hearts and minds of a large cross-section of people. Mainstream reactions to these developments were just rhetorical, not involving any active resistance. A focused movement against rising right-wing authoritarianism was beginning to crystallize, but with an inadequate constituency to spread far and wide.

Two decades of broad and vibrant socialist movements were becoming a blur as the long shadow of Hindutva stretched and spread. That was the time Gauri, gutsy as ever in her late thirties, stepped into Karnataka for an eventful innings of her life.

In 2000, the iconoclastic star of modern Kannada literature, P. Lankesh, breathed his last. He had provided a phenomenal cultural leadership with his news weekly whose tagline was 'the *Patrike* of the intelligent Kannada men and women'. I, like his other 'intelligent men and women' readers, thought that it was curtains down on an era. There were plenty of reasons to support this belief. A master of the Kannada language, he would write five to six columns in each issue, with an astonishing linguistic range that evoked multiple sensibilities. He was quite skeptical of the then vibrant left movements, to the extent of branding them 'pseudo rebels'. He had fixed ideas about the communists and refused to publish writers with any remote sympathy for them. But he was capable enough of creating his own brand of dissidence against authority. Such of us who were active in left movements still followed the tabloid for its sheer power of evoking dissidence with the most powerful use of metaphor in peerless colloquial Kannada. Like an institution, the weekly passionately nurtured a group of women and young writers. Lankesh was a shrewd editor who generated sufficient revenue to publish his weekly and live an enviable life for himself, without giving in to the lure of advertisements. He was among the first to sense the growth of Hindutva politics in the early 1990s. He sensed the menace of its divisive politics and formulated a sharp critique of it in his own way. His individual genius was the cornerstone for the success of his weekly: it is fair enough to say that successors were not going to be easy to find.

As a reader, I didn't have the slightest clue about his English journalism–bred daughter Gauri, who was taking over the reins of the tabloid after his death and changing its course. But that happened and the weekly continued its publication without a break, even as Lankesh's talented circle of writers distanced themselves from it.

Soon after Gauri took over the editorship, she published a report on the institutional transactions at the 'Eight Madhva Mathas' in Udupi. Since the powerful seer of one of the eight was a leading member of the VHP's Dharma Samsad, VHP and Bajrang Dal activists laid siege to all newspaper stalls, forcibly grabbed copies of the latest issue of *Lankesh Patrike* and burnt them in public. Then, they held a vengeful public meeting in a square situated at the intersection of four roads leading to the eight mathas. On the pretext of checking terrorist threats to mathas, the Udupi municipality had recently barred holding public meetings except for 'religious congregations' in that square. This fire-spitting, vengeful demonstration against *Lankesh Patrike*, addressed by the national president of the Bajrang Dal, local VHP leaders and the powerful seers, was held with no effort to conceal its political venom. The editor and writers of the *Patrike* were warned of dire consequences in the presence of a huge posse of police. No action was initiated on the vandalism against *Patrike*.

I wrote a detailed report and sent it to *Patrike*. After receiving it, the new editor whom I didn't know personally called me and declared, "What a terrible place! How do you people live there! Anyway I shall publish the report verbatim. Keep writing to *Patrike*." Since its inception in 1980, Lankesh as editor had made it a point to publish the names of persons and organizations perpetrating crime, after duly verifying details from the reporters or writers; whatever mainstream papers covered up with sterile terms—'an accused' or 'an organization'—Lankesh knew was for reasons of power; he wasn't inclined to please the powers that be. Gauri uncompromisingly continued that editorial policy, which encouraged many of us to write regularly to *Patrike* on the unabated Hindutva political violence in coastal Karnataka. Whenever the frequency of reporting decreased, she would call and ask "Thank God! Is it peace or a ceasefire?"

Activist reporting was not new to *Patrike*. It had many dalit and women activists from socialist circles as its reporters since the 1980s. But they were handpicked by Lankesh and reports from activists working in the field were generally kept at bay. This changed during Gauri's editorship. One could see a steady stream of field activists writing about ongoing struggles. In those days, Gauri was not aware of the variety of organizations active in Karnataka and their ideological bases. Whenever such reports arrived for publication, she would seek clarifications from some of us who had been with the movements for decades. Many a time, while having the intricate ideological distinctions of groups explained to her, she would say "Why do you people have such hair-splitting differences! Isn't it better to have broader unity? Anyway, I don't want to get involved with any of you!" But she used to publish the pieces without inhibition. It seems that was how she educated herself about the social realities of Karnataka and their implications. It is how she got to know of the Bababudangiri Harmony Forum (BHF), started three years before her arrival, against the Sangh parivar's campaign to destroy the syncretic dargah at Bababudangiri in Chikmagalur district.

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In 2002, BJP leaders openly declared that they would turn "Karnataka into Gujarat and make Bababudangiri another Ayodhya." In response, the BHF vigorously mobilized all the anti-Hindutva sections of Karnataka onto a single platform and formed the Karnataka Komu Souharda Vedike (KKSV), organized an historic rally and public meeting at Chikmagalur and initiated the first proactive resistance to the advance of the right wing. Gauri was impressed and started involving herself in KKSV's activities. Being a broad forum of people's organizations and willing individuals, KKSV had a flexible organizational structure. The flexibility suited Gauri, with her liberal's unease about getting shackled to any organization. The KKSV was successful in bringing not only leading writers and intellectuals of Karnataka but also nationally recognized figures such as Teesta Setalvad, Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy into the movement. *Patrike* became a voice of the movement as the editor actively plunged into it.

The following year, the tussle between KKSV and the Sangh parivar intensified so much that the Karnataka state government clamped prohibitory orders on any outdoor gathering in Chikmagalur. This was on the eve of the Sangh parivar's mobilization at the dargah in December 2003—under the pretext of celebrating 'Datta Jayanthi' at the Sufi shrine. The KKSV ventured to aggressively counter the strategy and mobilized activists and intellectuals in a march to Chikmagalur. Gauri's enthusiasm for the movement was so high that, while the police detained leading intellectuals and prevented them from reaching Chikmagalur, she made a clandestine entry into the town along with hundreds of activists, showed up at the scheduled time of the public meeting and courted arrest. She ensured the timely publication of *Patrike* from inside the jail. Her editorial beamed with the confidence of her new-found activism. Becoming the leading face of the KKSV movement, she went on, over the years, to seek legal justice for the shrine in the Supreme Court, with the help of the Teesta Setalvad-led Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP). A liberal journalist who wished to remain independent of any organizational identity until her last breath, she willingly offered to be the public face of a movement countering Hindutva's political designs. Her rise to prominence was astonishing even to those of us who were active in the KKSV movement, but the pressures of social activism didn't allow us the luxury of analyzing her metamorphosis in just two years.

Gauri's participation in the KKSV movement opened her mind to various forms of struggle being waged concurrently in society. Human rights activists introduced her to the ideas of naxalism during this time. By now, CPI-ML (Maoist) guerillas had entered the forests of the Western Ghats and were organizing to strengthen their party in Karnataka. In June 2004 the leader of the party, Saketh Rajan, invited journalists from Karnataka for a press briefing about the aims and ideals of the party. Saketh Rajan was Gauri's senior at Bangalore University and again at the Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi. As her editorial made clear, Gauri was very impressed by the aims and ideals of the movement but opposed to the means chosen to achieve them. During the same year, Gauri, through her interaction with Human Right activists, became aware of differences within the Maoist Party over the pursuit of armed struggle and the willingness of one faction to quit the guerilla path.

She became part of the Citizens Initiative for Peace (CIP), which was proactively mediating with the Karnataka state government for the peaceful entry of a faction of the Maoist party into the mainstream. But the encounter killing of Saketh Rajan in February 2005 retarded the process. Still Gauri actively wrote about the naxal objectives she felt were justified and about why her involvement with CIP made sense. The editor's enthusiasm for making *Patrike* a platform for such a cause didn't go down well with her younger brother, Indrajit, who was the legal proprietor and publisher of *Patrike*. She decided to quit the editor's position and, acting on the advice and support of sympathizers of her peace initiative, launched her own *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*.

Upon the BJP coming to power in Karnataka in 2007 and the consequent intensification of the communal onslaught of the Sangh parivar, Gauri's paper assumed the role of an active resistance platform against right-wing forces. By 2010, she had transformed herself into a public voice of dalits, women and left movements of Karnataka and her public profile grew proportionately. With the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government coming to power in 2013, her CIP activism resumed and the culmination of that process—the re-entry of two Maoist leaders into the mainstream—boosted her public image to an iconic status. By the end of 2016, 'Gauri Madam' could be seen in all sorts of people's movements, always surrounded by adoring youth activists.

The year 2000 was when she was introduced to Karnataka as a journalist; by 2003, she was a journalist-activist and, by

2015, she had become an activist-journalist. Those of us who sailed with her in this current didn't even pause to gauge her phenomenal transformation.

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Gauri started out as a regular middle class journalist with all the attendant preoccupations, and some of her own. It required a certain courage born out of selflessness to respond to the call of the time, to take a stand, call a spade a spade. Even a cursory glance at her life before 2000 is enough to show that she was an extraordinarily strong-willed woman, who was not afraid to challenge patriarchy and had the guts to lead the life of a single woman. We should know that it is not commonplace or easy to do; we who trade off our dissidence for the security of belonging to social institutions. Gauri did not do that. Her resolve to keep her individual liberty intact was known to everyone who sailed with her. She participated willingly in movements, but refused to be subsumed under an organizational structure. She respected others' liberty, but never allowed it to shackle her own. She could be stubborn in her relationships, but was never dictatorial.

She became part of the KKSV movement because of her strong antipathy towards Hindu nationalism; in particular, its patriarchal aspect and its scuttling of individual freedom. *Patrike*, even before she assumed its editorship, had a strong legacy as a platform for an independent critique of Hindutva politics, based on common sense. Her father was one of the few leading writers of Kannada who was ready to take on the forces of Hindutva well before 1990 and Gauri was proud of that legacy. She readily inculcated her father's intellectual critique of the Vedic hegemony and oppressive caste system. So her siding with the KKSV movement was not serendipitous or the result of any ideological luring on the part of the Vedike. It was a process of engagement between an individual's intellect and a social movement.

As far as Gauri's engagement with the CIP is concerned, one point has to be clarified at the outset: in Karnataka, since the 1990s, absolutely anybody who opposes the Hindu right wing gets branded a communist or naxalite or at the very least a naxalite sympathizer. This is not just the practice of the Sangh parivar, but also passes unchallenged by those whose stand vis-à-vis the Hindu right is one of stern silence. In this atmosphere, Gauri being branded as leader of the pack of naxalite sympathizers was inevitable. But she was never other than a democrat who wished that the naxals return to mainstream political life.

Thus, I am sure that her activism for the CIP wasn't guided by any ideological affinities, nor did she have a clear political direction to propose to those people whom she strove to bring to the democratic mainstream. Especially during her second stint with the CIP, she had allies like the veteran freedom fighter H.S. Doreswamy, and free-wheeling dissident of Karnataka politics A.K. Subbaiah. The trio were ready to plunge into any struggle for the public good irrespective of its ideological moorings.

The left in Karnataka is severely short of resources and public good will. It is the likes of Gauri, Doreswamy or the odd film star siding with resistance movements from the margins of society, who are noticed and feared by the establishment. The resistance movements that organize themselves with scant resources do not always find support from influential intellectuals.

Gauri was a fine English language journalist. If instead of channelizing her energy towards causes from the margins, she had utilized it to write columns in reputed mainstream publications, politely adjusting to hegemonic pressures, she would have been well provided for, socially and financially. Yes, she widened her social awareness as an active participant with movements, but also had a will to employ those intellectual gains to sensitize the public towards the causes of social movements. That is the tribute she paid to the movements from which she gained awareness, while the movements which gained from her contributions are paying tribute to her in a way which stuns the pen pushers. We are used to remembering and eulogizing the contribution of an individual to society, but we never regard the stunning ways people pay back those contributions. Just as people benefited from her advocacy, interaction with them and campaigning on their behalf enriched her life. Gauri, who was barely five feet and an odd inch tall, even with all the added flair of her liberal individualism, may have looked unimposing, but was an enormous presence to the people who bore the brunt of the times she lived and worked in Karnataka.

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I was always jealous of Gauri's single life. My familial obligations didn't let me venture into the things she did. But she was also overburdened with her commitments to social movements and by the innumerable court cases filed against her as an editor. She used to rue not having time for family or to pursue her favorite passions. Looking at my frequent travel over weekends for activism, she once asked me, "Don't your wife and daughter object to your absence?" I said, "Yes, divided between a middle class family and activism, like Faiz

Ahmad Faiz said, everything gets done by halves." She laughed heartily and said, "But you are lying! You are enjoying yourself with your extended family! Your wife and daughter are the ones who are deprived." Yes, social movements give one an extended family, and being single she enjoyed the love she got from them. A person who never even answered urgent calls while watching her favorite tv serials was now taking calls from all her adoptive sisters, brothers, daughters and sons. The number of boys and girls she used to affectionately befriend as 'mari' (a gender neutral term in Kannada for 'the little one') was astonishing by the end. Since 2015, at every other meeting I used to see her surrounded by young ones calling her 'Amma'. She had a loving chemistry with them. Many of them were not regular activists. For many middle aged activists, she used to be 'Gauri Madam'.

On 6 September 2017, a day after Gauri was assassinated in Bengaluru, in a village named Taleguppa, 400 km away from the capital, Poornima, a single woman in her late thirties, made a placard of protest and stood in the village market place for an hour, then marched alone for 21 km to the nearby taluk town of Sagara, and held a protest demonstration alone. She had learnt painting and made a living with a small farm of her own. She had never met Gauri. The stubbornness of her act stunned me. I knew Gauri, but Poornima knew her much better.

I never made it to Mangalore

Rajdeep Sardesai

In early August, Gauri Lankesh rang me up with a special request: "I am helping to organize an event in Mangalore for progressive Muslim writers, I am keen that you should attend." I asked her a little more about the group, and why it was confined to Muslim writers. "Trust me Rajdeep, these are genuine grassroot intellectuals that you would like to listen to, and I'm sure they would like to hear you too," she replied. She said that the aim of the conference was to build bridges, to find ways in which to promote the values of peace and tolerance. Gauri could be very persuasive, so a few weeks later, she WhatsApped me again: "Remember my request, when can we have you in Mangalore?" I promised her that I would confirm within a week. The week, sadly, would never come.

A few days later, I was preparing for my 9 pm news show. The Rohingya issue was top of the mind that evening and I had prerecorded a discussion questioning the government policy of deporting thousands of people, including women and children. As I walked into the studio, I was shaken out of my comfort zone. There was a news flash onscreen: 'Breaking News: Gauri Lankesh shot dead'. For a moment, as I adjusted my mic and jacket and prepared to read the headlines, I was gripped by a sense of total numbness. I read the headlines in a state of shock before my producer whispered, "Sir, let's go straight to the breaking news, journalist Gauri Lankesh has been shot dead."

News journalists living in the whirl of 24-hour television where today's news is the next hour's history are inured to earthquake, flash floods, terror, disaster. Even so, when a news flash tells you that someone you know has just been shot dead, the mind freezes, the hands start to shake. We managed to finish the news show that evening amidst a rising sense of disbelief, sadness and yes, anger. "Shit," I said to myself, "Don't tell me that Gauri has been killed by one of the right wing loonies she has been speaking out against." I even put this question to a Karnataka BJP local leader on the show, a question that seemed to agitate him, perhaps rightly so, since within minutes of a murder how does one reach any conclusion on the killers or their motives.

And yet, Gauri's death seemed to fit in a pattern. Prof Kalburgi, Dr Narendra Dabholkar, Govindrao Pansare, all staunch rationalist voices shot dead by unknown assassins, their murderers, shamefully, still not caught or convicted. All these individuals, much like Gauri, had spoken out against a poisonous streak of communal politics, an ideology driven by hate and prejudice. Was Gauri also a victim of these hate-mongers simply because she had refused to back off and instead chosen to confront them? Or was there some other angle to her killing that might not be immediately apparent? It was wrong to speculate while the investigations were still ongoing. We were not sure who had killed Gauri, but we were certain of who was gloating over, almost celebrating her death. The venomous response on social media in particular against her, suggesting that she 'deserved' to die because she was an 'anti-national', 'leftist', 'naxal sympathizer', left me dazed. Is this what we had come to as a 'civil' society, so polarized that we could not even mourn the dead with dignity? And why would the prime minister of our country choose to follow such ugly voices on Twitter?

I cannot claim to have known Gauri intimately but always saw her as an integral part of the larger journalistic fraternity. Yes, there was a time when journalists saw themselves as part of a community, and not as 'rivals' engaged in constant one-upmanship. Gauri and I both started at *Times of India* around the same period. She moved on to *Sunday* magazine and later became a driving force at the Kannada newsmagazine, *Lankesh Patrike*, that her father had started. While Gauri sought to go back to her roots, I chose to drift from print into the glamour world of television. I was in the public gaze as a 'celebrity' anchor but always admired Gauri for the manner in which she had abandoned the high-profile 'mainstream' media to build an institution that was seeking to bridge the gaping divide between regional and English language journalism. While we were impostors in the rarefied world of national news tv studios, she was undoubtedly in touch with a more authentic reality. Whenever I needed an angry voice to respond to a Bengaluru issue, or indeed a show where communal politics was being discussed, I would turn to Gauri for an articulate perspective. Whenever there was a debate that angered her, she would sms or WhatsApp an irate response.

I sensed in Gauri's always energetic persona the earnest desire for change, the impatience with political correctness, the yearning for a better, more egalitarian society. I may not have agreed with all her views but respected the courage of her convictions. She was not a cynic but an idealist who hoped and hankered for a more just social and political system. I could never have matched her revolutionary fervor: she lived life with the spirit of a fearless advocate for human rights, with an uncompromising attitude of reaching out to those who she felt were being victimized. Which is why I guess she was pushing me to attend the Muslim writers' forum in Mangalore, if only to listen to marginalized voices she thought I would probably never get to hear in a noisy studio cage. I will still try and go to Mangalore one day soon. Only Gauri won't be there by my side.

She made time for Mukhtiar Ali

Mamta Sagar

Sometime in the early 1990s Gauri, Pratibha Nandakumar, the poet, and I decided to go to Heggodu. We met at the *Patrike* office. NiNaSam—short for Nilakanteshwara Natyaseva Samgha, an organization founded by critic and theatre personality K.V. Subbanna in 1949—was showcasing *Macbeth* that year, as part of Tirugaata, its traveling theatre troupe. As we were leaving, Lankesh commented that three witches were off to watch *Macbeth*. Gauri drove her car all the way from Bengaluru to Heggodu, 400 kilometres. On our way there, we visited her uncle at Shivamogga and then landed up that evening at director–playwright Prasanna's place in Heggodu. The house was crowded with guests and we were accommodated on the first floor. Until midnight we gossiped about the Kannada male intellectual community and its default setting in patriarchy. As we woke up in the morning the critic D.R. Nagaraj, Prasanna and the whole lot of men who had been under discussion the previous night started clarifying their position and responding to our 'doubts'. That's when we realized that whatever we spoke on the first floor was clearly audible on the floor below. We were embarrassed but also felt wickedly elated and had a good laugh.

Gauri was very popular with children. She was caring and never restricted them from anything they deserved. Our son has a special place in his heart for Gauri Aunty. He had gifted his tiny sculptures to her which she preserved and often spoke fondly of to friends. Every time we came visiting from Hyderabad, she spared a day for Chukki. She took him on an outing and bought him whatever he wished for. I am sure she also spoke to him about his concerns as a male child growing up amid all the mixed messages of this complex world filled with discrimination. On one such trip, both of them went to the Indira Gandhi Planetarium, then a new place of attraction and as the show commenced, they dozed off in the air-conditioned hall. The security guard had to wake them up when the show was over. In her spontaneity, she was like a child.

We lived in Hyderabad for more than fifteen years. Gauri came to spent a few days with us. Both of us went to watch the shooting of the Telugu movie *Anthapuram* in which our friend Prakash Raj was acting. We whistled and cheered at his appearances. We even contrived to introduce a bachelor friend from the film fraternity to our next-door neighbor. The girl's mother was furious with me when she realized that her daughter's prospective friend was someone from the film field. It didn't help matters that she had found us drinking, smoking and laughing aloud. Gauri's hilarity always began with her face blooming into a smile which then broadened into hearty laughter.

Whenever we were in Bengaluru during the summer vacations, she would throw a party. Gauri's parties were a place for meeting friends, old and new. On one of those visits my husband Sham, an artist, worked on his wood sculptures in Gauri's backyard. Later, when we were away from the house, a thief used the steel axe from Sham's tool kit and broke open Gauri's rooms. He not only stole valuables but ransacked the entire house. She said, "Thank God, nothing happened to you."

My husband and I decided to build our house in RR Nagar, Bengaluru, only because we had friends like her for neighbors. We as the 'ra ra nagara' community met at each other's houses for get-togethers, music concerts, birthday parties or when we had friends visiting—for odd reasons, and often no reason at all. There would be heated arguments, leg pulling, gossip sessions, confessions and whatnot. Politics, the current state of affairs, the efficacy of falling in love as a means to make people realize the worth of love and affection in this world: these were the topics that saw animated discussion.

We would make plans for movies at the mall. Gauri was busy and often opted out. She complained and spoke of how an unsympathetic world kept her busy. These little interactions were relaxing for her and she relished them. The Gauri we knew was so very different from the one people saw as an activist, addressing public gatherings.

When she spoke of the people of this country, she saw them as individuals associated with their community and caste identities. She never spoke in terms of religion as it dissolved their diversities and pluralities. This helped us, the privileged lot, to get a clearer picture of the issues around us. Thus she constantly reminded us and herself that caste was an issue that needed to be addressed. She had friends across caste, class and gender backgrounds and everyone loved her for her sincerity—that heart as big as an ocean. She loved and respected people who struggled hard to make their place in life.

Whenever Mukhtiar Ali, the folk singer from Rajasthan, was in Bengaluru we hosted a session at our place. Gauri somehow managed to steal time for this. She always came late but stayed for long. She ate very little and was among the very last to eat, when everything was either running out or had gone cold.

After she became immersed in the *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, she hardly had any free time left. Her involvement with the Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum, and her trenchant resistance to discrimination on grounds of religion, caste and gender reflected her engagement with a wide cross-section of humanity. The stress began to show on her as that thin line between the personal and the public faded.

While her sense of justice was universal, her concerns were rooted in the here and now. Her aversion to hatred came from kindness, compassion and social concerns innate to her as an individual. The selflessness practised by her accommodated everything and everyone.

If Gauri had known her assassins, she would have simply approached them with her big smile and sparkling eyes, given them a tight hug, asked them to throw that gun down and join her for a drink.

The life before the death

Umar Khalid

Sometime in the first week of August this year, an extremely perturbed Gauri Lankesh messaged me on WhatsApp. Earlier in the day, a student rally attended by Kanhaiya Kumar had been attacked by right-wing goons. We had a brief conversation, she told me to be careful when I traveled and signed off the conversation inviting me to her home in Bangalore.

A month later, she was shot dead outside her home. Journalists, academics, common citizens and students gathered outside the Press Club of India in Delhi the next day to protest this murder. I was called out to speak. Unable to gather my thoughts in shock and rage, I did not know what to say. I just took out my phone, and read out this month-old message.

"I will not be able to bear it, if anything happens to any of you," she had told me. As I read this out, Gauri was already dead, I was still alive. How was I supposed to bear this loss now—a friend so brutally snatched away from us? The only thing I knew was that her murderers are not going to achieve their objective of silencing us through this cowardly act. It had the opposite effect as thousands of people flocked to the streets in different parts of the country in protest with #IamGauri slogans.

But who exactly was Gauri? I had gotten to know her only in the last six months before her assassination. The first time I met her was at a student protest, which she had also joined. She called me up to a side, introduced herself to me and in the same breath stated that I was one of her 'adopted ideological sons'. Subsequently every time we met, she would bring gifts as a mother might do for her child, and remain in regular touch in the intervening period.

It was only after her assassination that I became aware of the fact that she had been receiving threats for her work and words. On all those occasions, while she called me up to enquire about my safety, she never mentioned the threats to her.

Gauri was everything that the Sangh loves to hate—a fearless and opinionated single woman, an extremely important voice against Hindutva and someone who wrote extensively against caste. At a time when several journalists have aligned themselves closely with power, she kept the true meaning of journalism alive by speaking truth to power.

Gauri did not take the threats seriously. Even on the occasions when she called me up asking after my safety, her concern never entailed asking me to leave or even dilute what I was doing.

She was a mother to most of us in the Brechtian sense—Mother Courage—one who epitomized strength and fearlessness. Our age difference never mattered as we could speak to each other regarding everything from politics to different social movements and even relationships. Later, as obituaries started pouring in, I found that this was how Gauri was with most people she became acquainted with.

Several people have already written extensively about the manner in which she served as a bridge between various democratic struggles in Karnataka. The inability of similar forces in Delhi to do the same, and especially the growing rift between left forces and Ambedkarite forces in JNU, troubled her greatly. She spoke to me about it on more than one occasion and described it as extremely frustrating and unfortunate.

I told her that this unity will take a long time to materialize, given that there was a legacy of mistrust on each side. She, on the other hand, saw the extreme urgency of an alliance to counter the RSS, a common cause which would alleviate the historical mistrust on either side. The bullets pumped into her, apart from other things, were also intended to eliminate someone who had the potential to build bridges between different movements, specifically the anti-caste and the left movements. With Gauri no longer there amongst us, I leave it to the two sides to determine if they see any worth in her words.

The stench of death is all around us—of farmers committing suicide in the forests and the fields, Muslims and dalits lynched by murderous mobs, students ending their lives in the universities or children choking to death in ill-equipped hospitals. Add to that a lot of blood on the streets—of dissidents, their voices abruptly silenced.

Gauri had a distinctive voice. At times, I can still hear it echo in my ears. I still hope that my phone will ring and I get to hear that laughter. I know that it won't happen anymore. But the real tribute to her legacy would be to keep that laughter alive, to keep life itself alive. Let's not forget how Gauri died, but let us also continue to remember how she lived.

Contributors and translators

Bageshree S. works for *The Hindu* in Bengaluru. Her translation of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry into Kannada, *Preeti mattu Kranti* (Love and revolution, 2012) was published by Gauri Lankesh's Lankesh Prakashana.

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Sushma Veerappa is a filmmaker based in Bangalore. She has translated from Gauri Lankesh's writings for this book to mark solidarity with the activist-journalist's politics.

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Kavitha Lankesh supported the book in the middle of a difficult period. Indira Lankesh permitted excerpts from her autobiography, *Hulimaavu mattu Naanu* (A sour mango and I) to be carried in this book.

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This book carries a selection of Gauri's articles that appeared in *Bangalore Mirror, The Wire, Tehelka, The New York Times, Mayura*, and her interview to *Rediff.com*.

I am grateful to them all.

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POLITICS / JOURNALISM

Gauri Lankesh was the definitive activist-journalist, someone whose head and heart worked as one to encompass her life. Gathered here is a selection from Gauri's writings, spanning languages, publications and the length of her career. It flags the unfinished work and uphill struggles that remain her legacy, but also preserves her companionable voice for us to cherish, a talisman and inspiration. She was taken away from us in the middle of life, of living busily, large-heartedly, and with a clear gaze on the world—the qualities that animate this collection.

'We must keep Gauri's laughter alive, keep life itself alive'
Umar Khalid

'I wish all those who spread half-truths and lies read this book'
T.M. Krishna

'Her writings display an irreverence for people in power'
Indian Express

'An unavoidable pathos surrounds the book'
Biblio

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